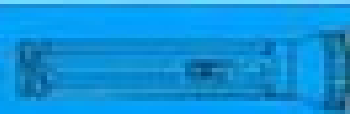
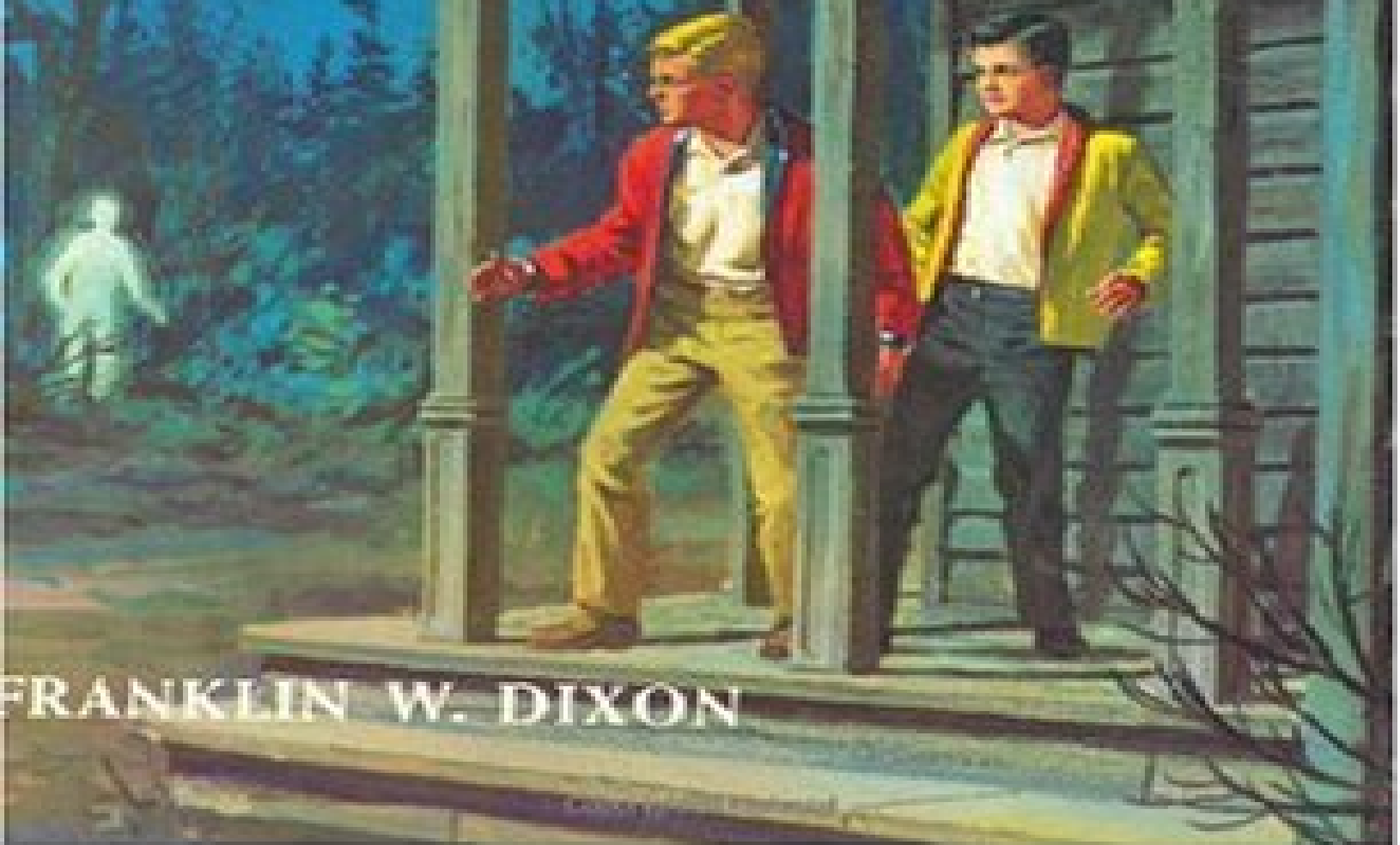


THE **HARDY BOYS**®



**19**

# THE DISAPPEARING FLOOR



FRANKLIN W. DIXON

## The Disappearing Floor

by Franklin W. Dixon

No. 19 in Hardy Boys series

This is the 1940 original text.

In the 1940 original, the Hardy Boys smash Duke Beeson's (AKA Chief Shining Light of the Sun-Worshipping Ozonites) robbery gang using the weird inventions of Aunt Gertrude's former classmate, Eben Adar. The 1964 version is completely different. This original text edition is generally regarded as the worst written story in the canon.

The Hardy Boys series by Franklin W. Dixon, the first 58 titles.

The first year is the original year. The second is the year it was revised.

- 01 The Tower Treasure 1927, 1959
- 02 The House on the Cliff 1927, 1959
- 03 The Secret of the Old Mill 1927, 1962
- 04 The Missing Chums 1927, 1962
- 05 Hunting for Hidden Gold 1928, 1963
- 06 The Shore Road Mystery 1928, 1964
- 07 The Secret of the Caves 1929, 1965
- 08 The Mystery of Cabin Island 1929, 1966
- 09 The Great Airport Mystery 1930, 1965
- 10 What Happened at Midnight 1931, 1967
- 11 While the Clock Ticked 1932, 1962
- 12 Footprints Under the Window 1933, 1962

- 13 The Mark on the Door 1934, 1967
- 14 The Hidden Harbor Mystery 1935, 1961
- 15 The Sinister Sign Post 1936, 1968
- 16 A Figure in Hiding 1937, 1965
- 17 The Secret Warning 1938, 1966
- 18 The Twisted Claw 1939, 1964
- 19 The Disappearing Floor 1940, 1964
- 20 The Mystery of the Flying Express 1941, 1968
- 21 The Clue of the Broken Blade 1942, 1969
- 22 The Flickering Torch Mystery 1943, 171
- 23 The Melted Coins 1944, 1970
- 24 The Short Wave Mystery 1945, 1966
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- 26 The Phantom Freighter 1947, 1970
- 27 The Secret of Skull Mountain 1948, 1966
- 28 The Sign of the Crooked Arrow 1949, 1970
- 29 The Secret of the Lost Tunnel 1950, 1968
- 30 The Wailing Siren Mystery 1951, 1968
- 31 The Secret of Wildcat Swamp 1952, 1969
- 32 The Crisscross Shadow 1953, 1969
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- 36 The Secret of Pirates' Hill 1956, 1972
- 37 The Ghost of Skeleton Rock 1957, 1966

- 38 The Mystery at Devil's Paw 1959, 1973
- 39 The Mystery of the Chinese Junk 1960
- 40 The Mystery of the Desert Giant 1961
- 41 The Clue of the Screeching Owl 1962
- 42 The Viking Symbol Mystery 1963
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- 50 Danger on the Vampire Trail 1971
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- 52 The Shattered Helmet 1973
- 53 The Clue of the Hissing Serpent 1974
- 54 The Mysterious Caravan 1975
- 55 The Witch-Master's Key 1976
- 56 The Jungle Pyramid 1977
- 57 Mystery of the Firebird Rocket 1978
- 58 Sting of the Scorpion 1979

*ILLUSTRATED BY* paul laune

NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP

## PUBLISHERS

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The Disappearing Boor

*Printed in the United States of America*

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# CHAPTER I

## BURIED ALIVE!

A splintering crash resounded over the bustling platform of Bayport's railroad station.

"Confound it, anyway! Why can't we do our camping at home?" exploded a chunky lad who lay sprawled on the ground amid a scattered assortment of pots, kettles and blankets.

The laughter of his young companions, who were similarly laden, was interrupted by the shrill voice of a slightly plump, middle-aged woman accompanying them.

"Frank Hardy! Joe! I should think you boys would help Chet to his feet instead of standing there laughing-----"

"Of course we shall, Aunt Gertrude," assented a tall, dark-haired lad whose clean-cut features were convulsed with mirth. "Come on, Joe. You grab Chet's feet. I'll take his head."

The younger Hardy boy winked a blue eye

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at his brother and smiled mischievously. "All ready, Frank. One, two, three-HEAVE!"

"For goodness' sake be careful," spluttered the fat lad, Chet Morton, whose awkwardness often made him the subject of his friends' good-natured taunts and pranks.

"There you are, Chet," Frank announced. " Back on your feet. And all in one piece, too."

" What do you mean *one* piece ?" The plump lad eyed his chums ironically. "More like a hundred pieces, I'd say, with all this junk I have to carry! Why, I-----"

"Psst! Boys!" interrupted a loud whisper. Aunt Gertrude caught Frank's sleeve and pointed toward a man not far from them on the station platform.

"Golly, look at those whiskers," Joe muttered. "It's a wonder he doesn't trip over 'em."

"I know him," Aunt Gertrude said in a voice quivering with excitement. "His name is Adar. Eben Adar. We went to the same school years ago."

She paused as the figure suddenly melted away into the jostling crowd which awaited the train. In a moment he reappeared, carrying a bulky valise. A pair of beady, shifting eyes surveyed them.

"Maybe he recognizes you, Aunt Gertrude," Frank whispered excitedly.

"Goodness, I hope not!" exploded the nerv-

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ous woman under her breath. "The man is probably a dangerous criminal. Do you know what he no doubt has in that bag?"

"His lunch," Joe commented dryly. "He looks more like a hungry tramp than a gangster. But I admit he is a queer-looking individual. "

His relative scowled. "He has burglar tools in that bag without a doubt. Why, we were suspicious of him even back in our school days. He was always snooping about and saying strange things."

Chet suddenly jammed his hands into his pockets and waddled toward the station exit. Joe and Frank hurried after him.

"Hey!" the younger Hardy lad began. "Where you-----f"

"Nothing doing, fellows," drawled the fat boy deliberately. "It's bad enough to have to lug all this camping junk around for the next month, but when gangsters are going along on the same train I draw the line! I was never meant to be a pack horse with an inquisitive nature anyway!"

Frank burst out laughing. "Shucks, Chet, don't you know Aunt Gertrude by this time? She thinks everybody's either a gangster or-----"



"Here comes the train," Joe announced. "Come on. In no time we'll be sitting around a campfire eating steak and potatoes."

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At the mention of food their plump chum weakened. He allowed himself to be dragged back to the platform just as the northbound express thundered in.

"Good-bye, boys," Aunt Gertrude chattered, planting a loud kiss on the cheek of each nephew. "Remember to keep warm. And stay in the tent when it rains. Did you hear me, Frank? Joe, did you bring your heavy socks? Your very *heaviest* ones?"

She hurried alongside their window in the day coach as the train gathered momentum. Then it swept past her and the brothers settled back with sighs of relief.

"Poor Aunt Gertrude," Joe said with a wry smile. "She'll worry herself sick over us until we get home."

"And if you ask me," Chet broke in, "she has plenty of reason to. That Adar fellow got on the car just ahead of ours. I saw him."

"That gives me an idea, fellows," Frank announced, winking at his brother. "Let's invite Adar to go camping with us. Probably he's had a lot of experience and-----"

"*What?*" Chet burst out. "Invite that-----"

He checked himself as he noticed his friends shaking with silent laughter. "Never mind, you two. One of these days you'll find out you 're not so smart! Somebody like that fellow with the whiskers *will* turn out to be a criminal."

#### Buried Alive! 5

The stout lad then lapsed into silence and refused to speak until the conductor sang out "G-r-e-a-t N-o-t-c-h! All off for Great Notch!"

In a flurry of confusion the boys gathered together their equipment and scrambled off, with Chet as usual in the rear.

"Now what?" scowled the fat lad, looking from the empty depot to the woods beyond.

"There's the path," Joe exclaimed. "Now for a good hike."

"A what?" Chet blinked. "Say, I thought we were ready to pitch camp. You are much too energetic to suit me. I'm ready to rest now and even more ready to eat."

It took considerable talking on the part of the brothers to persuade their chum to continue further. Grudgingly, he followed them. After an hour of steady tramping Chet suddenly sat firmly down on a rock.

"You fellows can go all the way to China for all I care. I'm staying here!" He removed one shoe and began rubbing his foot tenderly.

"Well, I guess that settles it," Frank laughed. "This is as good a place as any. How about a campfire over in that clearing?"

Joe walked across the small treeless area. "Looks to me as if somebody else had had the same idea, Frank. Here's a fireplace already built. It is just what we need."

His brother threw down his heavy pack and took a deep breath. "By golly, this is the life."

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Come on, Chet. Let's get a little wood for a fire while Joe peels a few potatoes."

Protesting that his feet ached, Chet nevertheless followed Frank into the underbrush. A few moments later they emerged with arms full of sticks. Joe stood beside the fireplace frowning at what appeared to be a slip of paper in his hand.

"Look at this, fellows."

The others dropped their wood and hurried over. "Just an old envelope, isn't it?" Frank queried. Then his face tightened. "It's sealed! What's that name printed in the corner?"

"Hard to read, it's so charred," his brother replied. "I fished the thing out of the fireplace."

"Let me see it. Maybe I can make it out," said Chet.

His nose all but touched the paper as he squinted at the blackened printing.

"I have it, fellows. 'Harry Tanwick,' it says. Who do you suppose he is?"

Joe answered by ripping open the scorched envelope. To the boys' amazement a one hundred dollar bill tumbled out. For a few moments even the talkative fat lad was too surprised to speak.

"Personally, I think we'd better get out of here," Chet said breathlessly. "I don't like the looks of this."

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"You mean you don't like the idea of finding a hundred dollars?" Joe queried with a sly smile.

"Fo, I don't, at least not here," the stout lad declared. "It may be a trick, or this may be a bandits' hide-out."

"I think we ought to turn the money over to the police at Great Notch," said Frank. "They may know something about this Tanwick fellow. In the meantime-----"

"In the meantime don't you fellows think it's about time for a meal? I'm so hungry I'd even be willing to get supper all alone," Chet offered with a woebegone expression.

The others agreed. Later, stuffed until they could eat no more, all three rolled themselves up in blankets and quickly fell asleep. Even Chet's loud and monotonous snoring did not disturb the brothers.

Hours later Frank suddenly awoke to the loud snapping of twigs. For an instant he lay motionless. With every muscle taut he listened, trying to tell from what direction the sounds were coming. The noise ceased. Straining his eyes into the shadows beyond the dying campfire the boy gave a start of

surprise as he spied a crouched figure. For several seconds it remained still, then began to creep stealthily toward them.

"Joe! Chet! Wake up!"

With a cry of alarm Frank leaped to his feet

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and flung himself toward the intruder. The shadowy form wheeled about and dived into the underbrush.

"There he goes!" the lad shouted, pointing at the spot as his companions dashed up.

The elder Hardy boy, leading the way, suddenly felt the ground give way sickeningly beneath his feet. For a horrible split second he plunged downward through inky blackness, then felt a crushing blow on his back as he hit something solid. His head swam. There came a shout almost at his elbow, followed by a piercing scream.

"Joe! Chet! Is that you?" Frank gasped.

There was a long silence followed by a weak response. "I-I think so, Frank. Golly, what happened to us?"

"I knew we should have stayed home," spluttered Chet's terror-stricken voice. "We're lost in a cave, sure as you're born!"

"We're in a cave all right, but we're not lost," Frank said grimly. "You can see the stars through the hole we fell into."

"Mighty far-off hole, if you ask me," Joe muttered disconsolately. "We must have fallen twenty feet!"

"Look!"

Frank clutched his brother's arm in the blackness. What Joe saw as he gazed upward made Mm gasp with horror.

"It's closing! The entrance is closing!"

## CHAPTER II

### HIDDEN TBEASTJEB

these was an ominous rumble of rocks while the boys, transfixed with horror, watched breathlessly. Frank suddenly pulled himself to his feet.

" Quick! "We might make it!"

In the blackness it was impossible to obtain a footing. Before Frank had pulled himself an inch nearer the rapidly narrowing cave entrance above them the last vestige of midnight sky disappeared.

"Too late," said Joe bitterly. "Now what are we going to do?"

"We must have started a landslide when we fell through the hole," Frank speculated. "Maybe we'll be able to loosen the rocks enough to get out."

"Landslide!" Chet snorted. "I'll bet a million dollars somebody shut us in here on purpose. Probably that fellow you saw at the campfire."

Frank was silent for a moment. " Maybe so, Chet," he agreed finally. "Still, why would anybody want to shut us up in a cave? We haven't done anything to a soul."

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"We haven't, but maybe Dad has," Joe suggested.

"Hm, that's an idea. Dad's working on an important case now, isn't he! Maybe one of the criminals he's after tracked *us* down for revenge! That would-----"

"Say, why don't we stop all this talk and find a way to get out of here?" Chet burst forth impatiently. "We'll be smothered any minute. It's getting stuffy already."

Just as the boy spoke Joe seized his brother's sleeve. "Listen!"

A queer scraping sound came from the blackness near them. Instinctively both lads stiffened, preparing instantly for whatever new danger might

threaten.

They had been well-trained in the art of preparedness in all emergencies, however desperate, for their teacher had been their own father, Fenton Hardy. The famous private detective took great pride in his sons' talent for following in his footsteps, and gave them every opportunity to aid him on important cases. On a few occasions the boys had solved baffling mysteries on their own and thus had earned enviable reputations in the town of Bayport as amateur detectives.

Their first success had occurred when they located some valuable loot which a dying criminal confessed to them had been hidden in a tower. On another occasion Frank and Joe had

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become involved in a series of desperate undersea exploits, and more recently had solved a mystery in connection with the insignia of a twisted claw.

Mrs. Hardy, to be sure, would have preferred that her sons plan to settle down in some profession less dangerous than that of bringing lawbreakers to justice. As for Aunt Gertrude, Fenton Hardy's elder spinster sister, she continually predicted death and destruction as the final outcome of the boys' adventures. Frank and Joe, on the other hand, never swayed from their determination to become as renowned as their father in the fascinating work of solving crimes.

At the present moment, however, the boy? secretly feared that their youthful careers were destined for a swift and terrible end. The scraping sound which had startled them a few moments before was rapidly approaching.

"What I wouldn't give for a flashlight!" Joe groaned under his breath.

Hardly had he spoken when the boys were blinded by a dazzling light. An instant later a hearty voice boomed out:

"Well, upon my word! How in the world did you three find your way in here 1"

"Dad!" exclaimed Frank and Joe in one surprised breath, while Chet was beside himself with joy.

"Golly, Mr. Hardy," he bubbled, "you found

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us just in time. The air here wouldn't have held out much longer."

Fenton Hardy, a handsome man even in the rough clothes he was wearing, laughed pleasantly. "No danger, Chet. There's enough air in this cave to last you a century. But tell me, boys, how-----"

He paused expectantly while the brothers looked gratefully at their parent and rescuer. Frank told their story. At its conclusion he said:

"And now, Dad, I think it's even more of a mystery that *you're* here."

"That's where you're wrong," Mr. Hardy smiled. "It's no mystery at all." He paused for an instant as if listening. Then, "You've heard of a gentleman robber by the name of Duke Beeson?"

" Beeson 1 Do you mean the racketeer 1" Joe burst out.

Mr. Hardy put a finger to his lips. "Not so loud, Joe. Yes, Beeson. But now he has a new kind of work-at least, that's what I think. I believe he has become a bank robber. He's the man I'm after. And if my guess is correct he's not far from this place."

"Jumping crickets!" Chet spluttered. "Suppose he should come in here!"

"There's a secret entrance not far away," Fenton Hardy went on. "I think Beeson and his gang haven't discovered it yet. I'll show

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you boys the way out and you can go on with your camping."

"But, Dad, can't we help you?" Joe pleaded. "We'd rather do that than anything else."

"You bet we would," Frank declared. "We can't leave you with so much to do all alone when we might be helping you."

Fenton Hardy held up his hand. Then his handsome face broke into a broad smile.

"Perhaps later, boys," he said gratefully. "There's nothing to do at present-nothing but wait."

"All right," agreed Joe.

Suddenly Frank fell to the ground as a small rock to which he had been clinging on the wall of the narrow passage gave way.

"Look!" cried Joe, jumping to his brother's side and picking up an object. "It's a bag! And there's money inside."

The detective turned his flashlight on the small sack Joe was holding. To the astonishment of all it was brimming with silver dollars.

"What a find!" he said.

"Must be a thousand dollars in there, Dad!" Frank exclaimed. "Say, I'm glad I was leaning on that rock."

"Here's something else," Joe interrupted, fumbling in the bag and drawing out a slip of paper. "Look! 'Property of Wayne County Bank', it says. What do you think of that?"

Mr. Hardy examined the paper. "Well, I'm

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not surprised, boys. In fact, this proves just what I've suspected right along, that this cave is the hideaway of Beeson and his gang. I suspect they are guilty of having recently robbed the Wayne County Bank."

"And killing the cashier at the same time," said Frank.

"Boys, before you go we might examine these walls a little more. Maybe we 'll find something else," suggested Mr. Hardy.

With an extra flashlight supplied by their father, Frank and Joe eagerly began a minute inspection of the vicinity while Chet gazed unenthusiastically over their shoulders. He was curious, but did not like work. In fact, his enthusiasm soon waned.



"I don't know whether you fellows have thought about it or not," he drawled presently, "but we haven't had a thing to eat since supper."

"You're right," Frank grinned, "and I'll bet it's only about four hours till breakfast time," he teased his chum.

Mr. Hardy came up to them. "Did I hear Chet say something about eating?" he smiled. The detective was well aware of the stout lad's interest in his stomach. "Here you are, Chet," he added, drawing several chocolate bars from his pocket.

Chet found it hard to suppress his eagerness. "Now I guess I'll be able to help look for more

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money bags," he grinned. "Thanks, Mr\* Hardy. You're a life saver."

Suddenly the detective snapped off his light\* Instinctively the boys followed suit.

"What's wrong, Dad?" Joe whispered.

"Somebody's coming. Listen!"

The hollow echo of voices was unmistakable, and footsteps were approaching rapidly.

"Play innocent, boys," ordered Mr. Hardy under his breath. "If you have to move camp, leave a trail and I'll follow you."

An instant later he had vanished into the shadows.

"What'll we do, Frank?" Joe queried breathlessly of his brother.

"Quick!" Frank cried. "Get that sack *back* in place!"

Joe snapped on the flashlight and the boys worked furiously. Just as Chet and Frank shoved the rock into place a rasping snarl interrupted them.

"What goes on here?"

The beam of a powerful hand torch encompassed them. As Frank replied he tried hard to control his voice.

"Nothing, sir. We're just campers. We fell into this cave by chance and----  
--"

"Oh, you did, eh? Wanderin' around at four o'clock in the mornin' jest for fun."

In the reflected light the boys could see that the speaker was a lean, wolfish-looking man

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with small, calculating eyes, a hatchetlike nose and a thin, cruel mouth. Beside him stood a short, heavily built older man who remained silent.

"If you three know what's good for you you'd better scoot and scoot fast. If you have a camp around here you'd better move it!"

The wolfish-looking stranger clamped his jaw shut like a steel trap as he finished speaking. Frank checked his rising anger.

"Yes, sir."

The three boys filed toward an exit indicated by the strangers and without further ado found themselves in thick underbrush. A brief search for bearings brought them to the edge of the clearing where their camp equipment lay unmolested.

"We're not going to let those-those fellows scare us off that easily, I hope," Joe remarked, eyeing his brother quizzically.

"Quiet," breathed Frank. "We're probably being watched. We'll move now and do our figuring later."

Without further discussion the boys broke camp in the gray light of approaching dawn. For nearly an hour they hiked deeper into the forest. On trees here and there Frank and Joe cut special secret marks, which the Hardys always used as identification, so their father could follow them.

"Another clearing," Joe announced as they

#### Hidden Treasure 17

swung around a curve. "How about it,

Frank?"

"Looks all right to me. Besides, I think a little food would taste good right now."

Chet eyed his chums ironically. "Don't tell me you fellows are really going to eat!"

"Of course, if you don't want to-----"

After a round of good-natured banter and a hearty breakfast the boys decided to await possible word from their father before making a move.

"If I know Dad he'll get in touch with us before night," Frank declared.

None of them was surprised when there was a low hail from the thicket just at dusk, followed by the figure of Fenton Hardy approaching the campfire.

"I have a little job for you boys," he said. "I need to get that money sack out of the cave. The men have left but there's no telling when they'll come back again."

Tense with excitement the chums hurried back to the cave with the detective. At the entrance Mr. Hardy said in the gathering darkness:

"We'll have to work fast, boys, and without lights. Eeady?"

The man apparently knew the cave well, for he soon led the others through total blackness to their destination at the far end of a narrow passage.

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"All right. I think we can use our lights for a moment. There's the rock, Frank."

"Bight, Dad. Joe, give me a hand. Look out, Chet!"

There was a rumble as the boulder dropped from its perch in the wall, revealing the sack of coin in a crevice.

"All set," Frank panted. "Lead the way, Dad, and I'll carry it out. Golly, it's heavier than I thought."

" Here, I '11 help," Chet offered. " The faster We get out of here the better. I-----"

"Without warning Fenton Hardy put out hia light.

"Someone's coming!" he warned in a hoarse whisper.

## CHAPTER III

### A DESPEEATE PLUNGE

muffled footfalls could be heard.

"Quick! Follow me!"

Mr. Hardy lunged through the blackness. The boys, struggling with the money sack in the narrow passageway, tried desperately to keep up with the retreating figure. Just *as* they approached the cave entrance Chet tripped and crashed to the rough earth with a yell.

"Oh, me!" Joe groaned. "We're caught now for certain."

A strong light suddenly dazzled them.

"You're right, you're caught!" rapped out an unpleasant voice with a familiar sound to it.

"Well, I'll be-it's the same kids," said someone else. "What do you know about that, Weeping Sam?"

"You're absolutely right, Runt."

The wolfish-looking man and his squat com' panion glared at the boys in silence for a moment. Finally the former spoke.

"You young 'uns lookin' for trouble?"

"No, sir," Frank replied without hesitation, "But we have plenty. Our friend is hurt."

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The stout lad lay still on the ground where he had fallen.

"I-I think I've broken my leg," the boy gasped weakly.

The thin man, whom the other had addressed as Weeping Sam, poked Chet with a heavy boot.

"Come on, get up. You ain't hurt. What'd you do-stumble? Say, you kids better go back to your nursery games and keep out of caves."

He laughed hoarsely at his own joke, then glared at the boys. For an instant Joe was ready to fling himself upon the evil-looking fellow but Frank checked his brother with a r<sup>r</sup>an-ingful look.

"We'll carry you out, Chet. Come on, Joe."

"An' when you get out this time, *stay out*," rasped Weeping Sam. "If we find you once more in here, it ain't goin' to go so easy with you."

With Chet between them the brothers filed out into the darkness. They floundered about in the dense thicket until Frank decided no one could be following them.

"Thanks, fellows," Chet beamed. "That was the best hike I ever took! Of course," he added as the Hardys pounced on their chum in pretended rage, "of course, my leg really hurts and I shouldn't walk on it."

"Send for an ambulance, Joe," Frank laughed. "But all joking aside, Chet, what

### A Desperate Plunge 21

happened to that sack of money? You fell on top of it and, well, it just disappeared."

"Don't ask me, fellows," said his chum, looking mystified. "Just as I went down the bag sort of slipped out of my hands and then it was gone. All I know is that my leg is still here and still hurts."

"That pouch probably fell into a crevice," Joe decided. "Lucky thing it did, too."

"Bight," Frank agreed. "Tell you what we'd better do. Let's sleep here till daybreak and then make another attempt. Those fellows ought to be gone by then."

Weary with the strenuous excitement of the past few hours, they lay down on the spot and soon were fast asleep. Even Chet had forgotten his

discomfort and lay there dreaming of succulent dishes without end. Joe was the first to awaken.

" Hey, time to get up!"

Chet opened one eye. "For goodness' sake, what's the hurry?" he grumbled. "We've been asleep only half an hour."

"Half an hour nothing! The sun's high."

"You'll gain more weight if you lie around during the morning," Frank teased, so at length the plump lad protestingly got up.

"If we'd stayed at home in the first place everything would have been all right," he said. "I never wanted to be a detective anyway."

Joe snorted. "Shucks, this isn't anything to

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worry about. We'll get that bag of money\$ take it back to the bank, and that'll be that.\*

"Wish I could believe you," said Chet.

"I've a hunch somehow that things aren't going to be so simple as you say, Joe," Frank mused.

"Probably not, judging by past experience," his brother grunted. "But in the meantime, let's get started."

An hour's stealthy tramp through dense undergrowth brought them to an aperture between two large rocks. It was half concealed in the foliage.

"Golly, your sense of direction isn't so bad," Joe exclaimed under his breath with an admiring glance at Frank. "This is the first time we've seen the entrance in daylight and you come right to it."

Chet looked worried. "How are we going to find out whether those gangsters are inside or not!"

"We'll have to take that chance," Frank said grimly. "Chet, you stand guard outside- you know our secret whistle if anybody should come along. Joe, you and I will get that bag of money out, pronto."

" If we can find it. Well, let us go."

Not a sound could be heard save the rustling of leaves. The brothers slipped noiselessly inside the cave and were swallowed up in darkness. Joe switched on the flashlight their father had given them.

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"Here's the place where Chet stumbled, Frank. You can see marks in the dirt."

"And there's the bag, Joe!"

"It looks just like a rock, doesn't it? Same color. Lucky thing that crevice happened to be there," said the other lad.

" I 'll say! Out she comes!"

"Whew, that bag not only looks like a rock but weighs as much as if it were two or three rocks."

"Good. Listen!"

"I don't hear anything."

"Neither do I. Just wanted to be sure. Say, where are we going to take this thing? You never said anything about that."

"We want to get it to a bank as soon as we can, don't we?"

"Naturally. But I think it would be a better idea to take it back to camp first. There's a chance Dad may be there waiting for us and will he be pleased!"

" Guess you 're right. All set ?"

Chet heaved a sigh of relief as his friends emerged. "Thank goodness we're getting away before those bandits take it into their heads to come back. Let me give you a hand, fellows."

So eager was the plump boy to leave the vicinity that he forgot to protest when it came his turn to carry the sack through the underbrush to their camp but trudged on without even a murmur.



## 24 The Disappearing Floor

"Wait a minute, fellows," said Frank as they neared their camp site. "I'd better see if the coast is clear-just in case." He slipped away and returned a quarter of an hour later. "Dad's waiting for us!" he exclaimed.

Excitedly the boys dragged the heavy sack the rest of the way to the clearing where Mr. Hardy was sitting.

"Good work, boys. Very, very good work! Tired?"

"Not a bit," Joe replied. "How about you, Chet?"

The fat lad grinned sheepishly and mopped his brow. "I always did like exercise," he drawled.

Their laughter subsided almost at once, for it was obvious from the detective's expression that serious business was afoot.

"We've no time to lose," he said gravely as he opened the sack and began feeling inside of it. "I've been able to check up pretty thoroughly on the movements and plans of Beeson and his men since last night."

"Are they going to pull another job, Dad?" Joe queried excitedly.

"Yes. Another bank robbery," replied his father. "But the point is, they're going to move their hiding place. We must-----"

"Catch them first. Isn't that what you mean, Dad?" Frank asked eagerly.

Mr. Hardy nodded. "Exactly. And that

## A Desperate Plunge 25

means I want you boys to get this money back to the Wayne County Bank as quickly as possible."

He held up a paper he had found inside the sack, proving it was the same pouch the boys had located before.

"We'll do it, don't worry about that!" Joe exclaimed. His brother nodded emphatic agreement.

Mr. Hardy drew out three envelopes and handed one to each of the boys. "I've written letters of identification for you," he explained. "You'll probably need them."

Frank nodded understandingly. "One or another of us will get there if all of us do not," he said solemnly.

"It won't be easy to do even that," Fenton Hardy went on. "Beeson and his men have become desperate criminals. You'll have to be on the alert every second until you're inside the doors of the bank."

After a hasty discussion the boys decided that in order to hurry they should make it easy to carry the unwieldy bag. Then no one would tire. Accordingly they improvised a stretcher from boughs and a few moments later departed in high spirits. Late afternoon found them at the deserted Great Notch depot after an uneventful trek.

"Now what?" Joe sighed. "I '11 bet the last train this month went by yesterday."

## 26 The Disappearing Floor

"Shouldn't be surprised," Frank grunted. "Guess we'll have to walk all the way, there comes something now!"

"Handcar. Maybe the man on it will pick us up."

The motor propelled vehicle rapidly bore down on them. At Frank's hail it scraped to a stop opposite them.

"You wanna ride, no?" queried the lone occupant. "Sure 'ing."

Joyfully the boys clambered aboard with their precious burden, and the car squeaked off. Fifteen minutes later they reached the main junction at Big Gap, where they took a sleeper for Wayne City.

"Hurry up, Chet," Frank urged as the three sat at breakfast in the dining car the next morning. "It's just about time to get off."

"What '11 we do, take a taxi?" Joe queried. "Maybe we ought to call the police, considering what we're carrying."

Frank shook his head. "We'd have to do too much explaining. A taxi will be all right. The driver won't know what's in the sack."

At the Wayne City station the boys left the train and hailed the nearest cab.

"Wayne County Bank-quick," Frank ordered the driver.

As the taxi wheeled around and chugged off, Joe nudged his brother. "I didn't like the way that driver looked at us." He spoke under

A Desperate Plunge 27

his breath and indicated the rough-looking man at the wheel.

"Neither did I. We'd better sit tight now, though. Probably all imagination."

Chet eyed his chums miserably. "That driver's a gangster sure as we're alive," he whispered. "Jumping tomcats, I'd give a billion dollars to be back in Bayport and-----"

The cab gave a sudden lurch and picked up speed, narrowly missing a large truck.

"Say, what's the idea? Trying to kill us?" Joe demanded of their driver. The fellow turned a sinister-looking face toward them for an instant. The taxi lurched again, spun dangerously around a corner with the tires shrieking, and roared down a narrow street.

"The fellow's crazy!" Frank shouted above the clatter.

He stood up in the swaying vehicle and lunged toward the man at the wheel. At the same instant sirens began wailing behind them.

"Turn off the ignition, Joe. Quick!"

Frank had one hand around the driver's neck and the other on the wheel. The car zigzagged crazily, scattering pedestrians and traffic alike.

"The drawbridge! It's open!" Joe yelled, trying desperately to reach the ignition key. "Chet! Grab the brake!"

It was too late. With a splintering crash the cab burst through the drawbridge gate and hurled itself into space.

## CHAPTER IV

### MISTAKEN IDENTITY

fob what seemed an eternity of suspense Frank Hardy's head spun. Then there was a terrific jolt and darkness closed in around him. A sharp spurt of icy water hit him squarely on the cheek.

"Joe 1 Chet! Are you there?"

"We're here, all right," came Joe's reassuring reply. "At least I am. Chet?"

"W-w-where are w-we?" gasped a faint voice. "G-g-golly, we're goners for sure!"

"Not yet," Frank said levelly. "Not if we move fast."

Fortunately the cab had settled in an upright position and both windows were readily accessible. Frank had his fingers on the handle in a moment.

"Lucky they were closed," he muttered. "Joe, where's the bag?"

"Eight under my feet. I'm ready when you are," said his brother.

"O. K. Close your eyes and hold your breath while I wind down this window. Ready, Chet?" asked Frank. "We must hurry."

"I-I think so."

28

Mistaken Identity 29

The stout boy's teeth were chattering so that speech was all but impossible.

"Here goes!" said Frank.

A solid wall of water hurtled into the cab. Spluttering and struggling to extricate themselves as rapidly as possible, Frank and Jo© seized the money bag together and battled their way to the surface.

"Boy, that was a close one!" Joe heaved as the two shot into the sunlight.

"I'll say! 'Where's-----"

His words were drowned out by the din and commotion of police sirens, crowds of spectators on the bridge, and half a dozen small motorboats. One of the latter swept toward them. Two husky longshoremen at the bow leaned out.

"All right, young fellers? We'll have ye aboard in a jiffy," sang out one.

"Huh! Got y'r duffel too, eh?" said the other, spying the bag which the boys were holding between them.

Four strong arms quickly lifted the brothers inside the boat, and the man at the helm turned toward the near-by shore. Joe meanwhile was scanning the water.

"Frank! Do you suppose Chet-----?"

"What's the matter?" broke in one of the rescuers. "Somebody else with you?"

"Yes, there most certainly was. Another young fellow about our age. We-----"

### 30 The Disappearing Floor

"Don't worry 'bout him. They's plenty of boats out there now." The man made a sweeping gesture and the brothers were relieved to see a veritable fleet of small craft swarming about the spot. "The coast guard will have divers overboard in half a minute, boys, so if your friend's trapped he'll soon get out."

The brothers nevertheless were worried. Neither of them had much of anything to say to the other. Reaching shore, Joe turned to Frank.

"You go ahead with the sack. I'll find out what happened to Chet. We'll join you later."

"I guess that would be the best idea, Joe. So long."

Joe offered the owners of the boat payment for taking him back to the scene of the taxi's plunge. He could hardly contain himself as they chugged alongside a coast guard patrol vessel.

Instantly his heart leaped high as he saw a fat boy standing on the deck. Could he be Chet? A closer view told him that the lad was indeed his chum.

"Hello," said the Morton lad. "I wish I'd brought along my bathing suit."

"Never mind your clothes," the Hardy lad replied excitedly. "Let's catch up with Frank. He's on his way to the bank."

Hastily thanking the coast guard officers for his rescue, Chet hopped aboard the other craft as it nosed alongside.

### Mistaken Identity 31

"Back to shore-quick," Joe sang out to the helmsman, putting a bill into the latter's horny palm.

The man grinned from ear to ear, shoved up the throttle, and raced shoreward well ahead of numerous curious onlookers in other small boats. Hardly had they touched the pier when Joe hailed a taxi.

"Wayne County Bank," he said to the driver.

The cab had covered not more than three blocks when Joe caught Chet's arm.

"Isn't that Frank over there? Look! Driver, stop!" he shouted.

The older Hardy lad stepped up, beaming. "Thank goodness it's you, Chet! We thought you 'd gone to Davy Jones's locker for certain," he told his chum.

"So did I," the plump boy confessed with a Wry smile. "Joe had hold of my arm but his fingers slipped off and, well, I just sort of got to the surface by accident."

"Thank goodness for that accident," Frank said fervently. "Say, my cab's had engine trouble. We'll all go in yours."

Quickly the valuable sack was transferred and a few minutes later the taxi cab drew up to the curb before a formidable looking stone building that was located right in the center of the busy city.

"Here's the bank," announced the driver.

Joe burst out laughing as they stepped to the

### 32 The Disappearing Floor

sidewalk. "You two look like a couple of drowned wharf rats."

"And I suppose you *don't*," his brother retorted. "You look like a scarecrow after a cloudburst."

"Oh, I-" Frank bit off his words and stared in astonishment.

A large crowd had collected about the taxi and the boys.

"Come on, fellows, let's get that bag inside," Joe said out of the corner of his mouth. "Too many people around here to suit me. And they don't look friendly. I guess the tension around this place has been pretty high lately."

As he stooped to pick up the sack a man dressed in overalls stepped up to them.

"Just what you got there, young fellows?" he asked.

Joe, fearful the man meant to take the bag, answered before he thought. "That's our affair."

"Is that so?" said the stranger. "Hey, Benny," he called to another workman near by, "I think maybe I've caught the bank robbers!"

At this point a newsboy dashed up and called loudly, "Say, are they the ones who killed Charley Rinehart, the cashier?"

Another urchin joined the group. "Are they the fellows who shot old Mr. Gray, the president?" he asked excitedly.

### Mistaken Identity 33

The hecklers grew in numbers. Try as they might, the boys could not get away from the crowd which was gathering. In vain did they protest; they were not even heard. The mob began to surge toward them. Several men held the boys.

"Police! Police!" yelled Frank.



"Take it easy!" shouted an officer, suddenly breaking through the mob. "I '11 manage this."

"Well, why don't you?" blazed a swarthy giant, shoving his way alongside the policeman. "Why don't you do somethin'-b'fore we do?"

"Yes, that's right!" screamed the whole mob. "They're robbers! Give 'em what they deserve !"

"I said I'd take care of this," roared the officer, his face almost purple from rage and exertion.

He whipped a police whistle from his pocket and blew three shrill blasts upon it, as if he were using that means of expressing his feelings.

"Now boys," he said, turning to the Hardys, "what have you got to say for yourselves?"

The crowd, instead of moving away, surged closer to the lads. Frank struggled desperately to get away from the iron clutch of the policeman.

"I-I-I've got-a letter!" he gasped.

"We both have!" added Joe.

### 34 The Disappearing Floor

Suddenly Frank wrenched an arm free and reached into the pocket containing the identification Fenton Hardy had given him.

"Look out!" roared a man in the crowd. "He's going to shoot!"

The excited mob ducked; that is, all but one person. This fellow delivered a crushing blow to Frank's head. It sent the lad spinning iuco the gutter.

## CHAPTER V

### A CBY FOR HELP

with a roar the mob rushed over the powerless officer and threatened to crush Frank to a pulp. As Joe and Chet battled to reach the older lad's side the wail of a siren sounded. This was followed by a succession of blasts on a police whistle. A moment later a dozen uniformed men plunged into the crowd.

"Get back there!" roared one, waving his night stick in the air. His fellow officers followed suit and bit by bit the excited throng fell back.

"Officer! Will you please read this?" Joe fairly shouted to make himself heard.

The policeman who stood beside him wheeled about with a scowl.

"What's that T Bead what 1"

"Please-this letter-----"

The younger Hardy lad fairly pushed the paper into the man's face.

"What's the idea? You'd better save that for the judge, young fell-what's this?" The man frowned. "Fenton Hardy's signature? Where did you get this?"

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36 The Disappearing Floor

Joe returned the officer's gaze coolly. "Dad gave it to me, sir."

"Your dad is Fenton Hardy? The detective?"

"Yes, sir."

The crowd, which had remained silent for several moments, began to become impatient again. Angry murmurs swept through the onlookers.

"How'd you like me to run every one of you into jail!" roared the officer beside Joe. "If there's talking to be done I'll do it-and I'm going to do some right now."

He paused and glared the mob into a sheepish silence.

" This young fellow here is the son of Fenton Hardy, the famous detective you've all heard about."

A buzz of astonishment rippled through the throng. Of course they had heard of the man.

"What about the other two?" piped up a voice.

A chorus of voices joined in, with spectators in the front ranks pointing at Chet and Frank.

The officer hesitated. "Do you know them?" he queried, eyeing Joe sharply.

"Yes, sir. The dark-haired one is my brother Frank. The other is Chet Morton, a friend of ours," the lad replied.

"And we can prove it, if anybody will give us

*A Cry For Help 37*

the chance," Frank added, producing his letter and handing it over.

Chet followed suit. Hurriedly the policeman scanned the messages, then Frank told their story.

"These look all right," he grunted. "Anyhow, we'll check 'em later. In the meantime," he went on, looking at the waiting crowd, "you'd better scoot, and make it fast. These boys are not robbers. Charley! Jim! Listen here!"

Two other officers came up.

"Bun in everybody who hasn't left here in sixty seconds," he ordered.

The throng melted as if by magic.

"Now, boys, we'll finish your little trip with that bag. That is, if your friend here will let as."

He winked genially at Chet, who throughout the entire fracas had clung tenaciously to the money sack despite several attempts on the part of the spectators to wrest it from the hands of the stout lad.

"You're all right, Chet!" Joe grinned. "Maybe you don't like detective work but when it comes to a real pinch you're right there."

Frank nodded and for the moment their plump chum was the hero. Since he was so often the butt of jokes, he enjoyed this triumph immensely.

### 38 The Disappearing Floor

"Thanks, fellows," he blushed as the boys entered the bank. "Now maybe we can go back to Bayport and settle down to a calm life."

A group of bank officials descended upon the lads as Frank carried the sack across the smooth marble floor. Quickly the policeman recounted the boys' story, calling upon them for additional facts. The Hardys, knowing their father was not ready yet to summon police aid, made no mention of their encounter with Weeping Sam and Louie Butt.

"Well, so the money was hidden in a cave," mused Mr. Black, the vice president, when he had listened for several minutes. "Finding it and getting it down here must have been a real adventure. Now if you'll come with me to a back room we'll dry your clothes and straighten you out a bit. You must feel pretty uncomfortable."

The boys were led to an inner room where they removed their clothes. The three slicked up as best they could, then went to the vice-president's office.

"I shall see that Mr. Gray, our president, hears of this at the hospital," the man said. "He will be relieved when he learns the good news."

The official then described in detail the daring robbery and the shooting of the cashier and president.

### A Cry For Help 39

"It was done in cold blood, boys. It was one of the most terrible-----"

"Excuse me, sir," broke in a clerk, stepping into the room. "We have counted the money in the sack which these boys brought. The entire eighty-two thousand dollars is there, sir."

The lads gasped in astonishment.

"Eighty-two-thousand-why, we thought the bag held about one thousand dollars," Joe exclaimed with eyes popping, while Chet was speechless.

The policeman who had waited now spoke up. "I must be off," he said. "A few formalities will be necessary, boys. Have to check up, you know, for the records. Can we get hold of your dad by telephone? Is he at home?"

Frank shook his head. "Here's our number, though." He scribbled it down. "You can probably get Mother or our Aunt Gertrude^ Dad's older sister."

The officer nodded and left the room. A few moments later he returned with a slightly sheepish expression.

"Got your Aunt Gertrude, I think it was. I explained everything that happened and she told me what she thought of me and the whole police department. She didn't leave a thing unsaid, I can tell you."

Frank looked at Joe and the two boys burst into laughter, in which the officer joined heart

#### 40 The Disappearing Floor

ily. Their relative never gave compliments to her nephews in person, but she could be their champion when the occasion arose!

The phone on Mr. Black's desk suddenly rang. The official answered. After a moment's conversation he turned to the boys.

"I sent a messenger to the hospital to inform Mr. Gray of what has happened. Now he would like to see you."

"Is he badly hurt?" Frank asked.

"Yes. You won't be able to remain with him long, but he does wish to see you."

The policeman, leaving, shook hands with them. "We may want you boys later to identify that taxi driver who drove you into the water," he said. "He must have jumped out of that car and swum like a Trojan. Don't see how he did it."

At the hospital a pretty nurse ushered the youths into a flower-banked room where a white-haired man gazed at them. He was very weak.

"Don't try to talk, sir," Frank said quietly. "We'll tell you what happened."

He related the incidents that led to their discovery of the money and the subsequent journey to return it. The bank president raised a shaking hand limply.

"Thank-you, young man," he murmured. "You-shall be-well-rewarded for-----"

The nurse sprang to her patient's side.

A Cry For Help 41

"He has fainted," she whispered. "Please go quickly."

She whisked from the room and returned almost instantly with a doctor. He waved the boys out briskly.

Upon departing they were silent for several minutes. Beaching the street Chet was the first to become cheerful again.

"Strikes me we've been missing a lot of meals lately," he offered. "Anybody might think you two never eat."

"For once I believe you're right," Joe agreed. "There's a restaurant over there. Let's have a real feed and then go to a movie for some relaxation."

A few hours later, their spirits high again, the boys arrived at the depot and took a train for Big Gap junction.

"Bead us that newspaper you bought," Frank suggested to Chet as the three settled down for the ride on the local.

The stout lad unfolded the sheet and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Jumping Ned, Mr. Gray died!" he said. "That is a shame."

He showed the others the headline stating that the bank president had succumbed to the bullet wound inflicted by the robbers. Another story related how the boys had returned the valuable loot.

"We have become famous," Frank said, his

42 The Disappearing Floor

face serious, "but that doesn't mean we haven't a few worries ahead of us."

"You're right," his brother agreed. "I wonder how Dad's getting along."

"I'll feel a lot better when we get back to camp and find out. I hate even to think what might happen if any of those roughnecks should get hold of him," Frank said nervously.

"Don't think about it," Chet broke in. "I wish your father would go back to Bayport and take us with him. I don't like this kind of business."

"He will when Beeson is behind bars," said Joe emphatically. "But not before."

The engine roared into Big Gap Junction. Fortunately for the boys, a train to Great Notch was about to leave. They transferred, and after a jerky two-hour ride arrived at the deserted little depot.

"Gee willigers, all that walking to go through again," Chet sighed.

"Yes, but look what it's doing to your waistline," Joe teased. "You're beginning to look as if you are only one person!"

The fat boy turned a furious red. "Never mind, Joe Hardy, some day you'll wish *you* had a little more beef."

The chums walked rapidly, alternately exchanging taunts and discussing prospects ahead. At length Frank halted.

"What's the matter?" asked Joe.

A Cry For Help 43

"The cave is not far from here," Frank replied. "Maybe we'd better leave the trail and hit for it through the woods."

"Good idea," Joe seconded. "No telling when we might bump into our friend Weeping Sam if we stick to the path."

Cautiously and with as little noise as possible the three advanced through the tangled undergrowth toward the cave. They were nearing the entrance when Frank in the lead suddenly stopped.

"Listen!" he said. "What do I hear?"

"Somebody's groaning," Chet said, turning white. "Oh, I don't like this place."

The boys stood in alert silence for a moment.

"There it goes again!" Joe whispered. "It 'a coming from the cave, sure as shooting, Frank!"

"Yes. And if that isn't Dad's voice I'm stone deaf. Come on. Quick!"

## CHAPTER VI

throwing all caution to the winds, Frank charged through the underbrush speedily with the others at his heels. So great was their haste that they almost tripped over a tattered figure lying on the edge of a small clearing through which they were running.

"Dad! Whew, what a gash!"

Affectionately Joe knelt down and pressed a handkerchief against a bloody wound on his father's head, while Frank bent over the detective anxiously. Chet stood perfectly still, chills going up and down his spine.

"Who did it, Dad?" asked Frank.

"I-I'm not certain. Somebody-caught me by surprise last night-tried to kidnap me after knocking me out. I came to-" He paused and winced with pain. "I came to and got away but pretty soon I-----"

"You've been lying here all night and all of today?" Frank finished. "Golly, it's a good thing we came when we did. Joe, we'd better carry Dad to camp right away."

Fenton Hardy made a weak gesture. "Not



## Frank's Plan 45

-there. Better change-camp site before somebody-" He suddenly slumped. He had fainted.

"See if you can find some water, Joe," Frank said. "Chet, help me raise Dad's feet. That should bring him around."

Joe returned a few moments later. "I located a brook. Here's a wet handkerchief."

It was nearly an hour before the detective revived sufficiently under the ministrations of the boys to be moved. After a reconnoitering trip Frank selected a new camp site. It was covered so heavily with thicket as to be relatively safe from prying eyes. By nightfall they had transferred their equipment to the secluded spot.

"With three good doctors I feel like a new man," Mr. Hardy smiled from his blanket next to the campfire. "But I don't want you boys to spend all your time here. There's work to be done. Too much time has elapsed already."

"We're waiting for orders, Dad," Frank smiled back. "I guess Joe and I can leave so long as Chet stays with you."

"Suits me," declared their stout chum. "I'd a whole lot rather be here than back in that cave or drowning in some river!"

"Fine," the detective said. "Frank, I think you and Joe probably will learn a few interesting facts if you go to the cave. Beeson's men are usually there about this time of night. But

## 46 The Disappearing Floor

remember-" He looked at them sharply. "Don't take any foolish chances. Don't get caught, I beg of you."

"Never fear, Dad," Joe said confidently. "Come on, Frank, let's get going."

An hour later the brothers were safely inside the cave, which apparently was unoccupied.

"No use wasting time, Joe. We may as well poke around and see if we can find some more hidden treasure," Frank urged his brother.

"Good idea. Look, there's a rock that seems to be loose." He pointed his flashlight at the adjacent wall.

"Certainly does. Here, hold my light while I give it a poke. I'll bet-s-st!"

The younger Hardy lad suddenly switched off both lights.

"Did you hear them, Frank?" he whispered.

"Yes. They're coming this way. What'11 we do ? This is a pretty mess."

"Dad warned us. Where shall we go ? "

"Hide around that bend up ahead. Can you feel your way along?" whispered Frank.

"Sure."

Scuffling footsteps and a jumble of voices came closer. A light suddenly shone just around a bend in the narrow passage. Frank could feel his heart pounding as he waited for the newcomers to discover them.

"Let's sit down here, Louie," rasped an unpleasantly familiar voice.

Frank's Plan 47

"Aye. After all the walkin' we been doing lookin' for the boss."

"I'd like to get my hands on him, Louie. He thinks just because he's Beeson nobody else ought to be considered. Thinks he can get away with most anything."

"Sure does. Three weeks it's been now since the Wayne County job and he ain't divvied up a bit of the loot yet!"

"I'll fix him one o' these days, Louie. You wait. When he least expects it, too. I'm fed up with his way of doing business."

"You won't get much chance to do anything, Sam. Not if he don't want you to. That disappearing floor fools the cops. Maybe he'll fix it so it'll fool us one of these days."

Frank nudged his brother significantly as they stood flattened against the wall around the bend a few feet away.

" Oh, yeah ?" snorted Weeping Sam. " Think he'll fool me, do you? Well, just 'cause he goes around in that Indian Prince costume fooling those sun-praying people in that crazy camp o' his with lectures, that don't mean he can fool Weeping Sam! No, sir!"

"Maybe not," admitted the other after a long silence.

"Maybe not is right, Louie. Come on, I ain't going to hang around here all night."

Total darkness closed over the boys again as the footfalls echoed away.

#### 48 The Disappearing Floor

"Wow, I thought we were goners for certain that time," Joe exclaimed, heaving a sigh of relief when he was sure they could not be overheard.

"So did I," his brother laughed. "It was lucky for us that they sat down when they did. But what was all that about a disappearing floor ? Sounds interesting."

"You've got me, Frank. And what was that about Beeson going around in an Indian Prince's costume?" asked Joe, puzzled.

"Among a lot of-what did Sam. call them- sun-praying people ?"

" It's a mystery to me, Frank. Let's get back and tell Dad about it."

The detective listened with great interest to his sons' tale but offered no solution to the puzzle.

"We'll find out in due time, boys. I'll be back on my feet in a day or two."

Next morning, after a look at their dwindling food supplies, Frank and Joe prepared to set out on a purchasing trip. Again Chet was left in charge

of their father and the camp. The fat boy did not like the idea but was too loyal to the Hardys to complain.

"You'll find Windham the nearest town, boys, if you take the path down the west side of the mountain," the detective suggested. "You ought to be back by noon."

A rapid two-hour trek brought them to the

Frank's Plan 49

outskirts of a small rural village. The streets appeared to be deserted.

"And I see why," Joe observed. "Everybody's over there around that building in the square. Wonder what's going on?"

"By golly, you're right. Maybe something interesting is up."

To their surprise the crowd was standing about the entrance to a small bank. Two country police officers were engaged in a heated conversation in the doorway of the institution.

"What's going on?" Joe inquired of a farmer standing near them.

"Ain't ye heerd?" croaked the man, tugging at his whiskers. "Bank was robbed not half an hour ago. Fifty thousand, the bandits got, so folks is sayin'."

The brothers looked at each other.

"Beeson, sure as shootin', Joe," said Frank in a whisper.

"Maybe we ought to tell the police."

"Bight. I'll get the chief there."

Stepping up to one of the officers in the doorway he spoke in quiet tones. The policeman nodded and drew the boys aside.

"What's that you say? You think Duke Beeson's men did it?"

"We have certain information which leads us to believe that he might be responsible," Frank said.

The officer pondered for a moment. "Hmmm.

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## 50 The Disappearing Floor

Glad you mentioned it. We 'll get a posse out and comb the mountains right away. Much obliged, fellows. You've been a big help." He waved genially and was off.

Quickly the brothers made some purchases of foodstuffs and hastened back to camp, reaching it by noontime. Fenton Hardy nodded when Joe told of the latest bank robbery.

"It was Beeson, all right. Not a doubt. Better go back to the cave, boys. You may get some real information now."

The lads agreed. After a hasty lunch they hurried back. The afternoon's activities, however, were wasted apparently. Beeson's lieutenants, Weeping Sam and Louie, failed to show up; nor was the boys' search for more hidden loot successful.

"I'm certainly disappointed," said Frank.

"Shucks," Joe exclaimed impatiently just as darkness fell. "Let's go back to camp. We're not-----"

"Quick! Turn off the light! They're coming!"

"Back to that crevice we found! It'll just hold us!" said Joe.

The brothers were just in time. Heavy footfalls sounded, then came to a stop not more than ten feet away from them. A sharp clinking sound could be heard, punctuated by excited breathing.

"Thinks he can keep everything for himself,

Prank's Plan 51

does he?" growled a voice. "I'll show him! I'll show him! I'll-----"

The voice stopped. The clinking sound began again at a furious rate, continued for a moment, then ceased. More footsteps resounded, then a shrill voice shattered the stillness.

"So! Going back on a pal, eh I Trying to get away with that bag o' Wayne County money?"

"Fat chance when it's already gone, Louie Butt," hissed the other. "Where'd you hide it?"

"Me? Me hide it? I didn't touch anything, Weepin' Sam. You'd better look out when you accuse Louie Butt of stealing."

There was a loud *snap* followed by sounds of a terrific struggle. Peering from their niche in the wall the boys could see the two men locked in fierce combat, groaning, heaving, and swinging their fists desperately. Suddenly both collapsed on the floor of the cave and lay motionless.

"I'd call that a tie," Joe chuckled.

"As perfect as they make 'em," his brother agreed. "What'll we do with the men?"

"Nothing, I guess. Golly, Frank, if we could only find that disappearing floor we'd be a long way ahead with all this business."

"You're right, Joe. But I haven't seen anything in here yet that looks one bit like a disappearing floor."

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"Neither have I. Let's have one more look. First we'd better relieve these men of their flashlights."

The instruments, still lighted, lay on the ground where they had fallen in the scuffle. As Frank stooped to pick them up, he suddenly caught his brother's arm.

"Get back!" he whispered in desperation. "Somebody else is coming,"

Joe's face blanched with horror as the figure of a native of India, in the full garb of a Prince, stepped noiselessly through the entrance to the cave. A pair of cruel-looking eyes blinked in *tip e i* rays of the two flashlights on the ground.

## CHAPTER VII

### A STRANGE WEEK END

the Hardy boys shrank back into the shadows, fully expecting a knife to come whistling toward them at any second.

"He didn't see us!" Joe whispered excitedly into his brother's ear.

"Thank goodness those flashlights were on! What's he doing? Can you spot him?" asked Frank.

"Just barely. This rock's in the way. He's just standing there staring at Sam and Louie and looking plenty mad!"

"Move your head a little, so I can get a look," requested Frank. "Say, he's holding a bag."

"Looks like another haul from some bank. The Windham Bank, do you suppose?" asked Joe.

"Maybe so, if he's Beeson in disguise. But Sie could be a native of India. Certainly looks like one in that rig."

"He has dropped the bag. Where's he going Stow?" whispered Joe excitedly.

"He's heading for the crevice where we

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found the Wayne County money! Remember? It was over there on that side, about halfway tip," replied Frank.

"By golly, wait till he finds out-----"

"Sssh! He sees the money is gone! Boy, does he look mad!"

"Frank, he's coming this way! He's going to find us, sure as you're born!"

"He is, unless-----"

The older lad, his jaw set, suddenly scooped up a handful of pebbles from a small ledge at his elbow. "With lightning motion he hurled them with all his strength at the figures on the ground. There was a loud crackling sound.

"Wh-where am I? Who did that?" moaned a guttural voice. Weeping Sam sat bolt upright. «< Oh-it-it's you, Boss!"

"Yes, it's me," the native of India replied. He spoke without a foreign accent. "Maybe you can explain just why you and Louie Butt are-----"

"We haven't done a thing, Boss! Honest, we haven't. We were just takin' a snooze, weren't we, Louie?"

The squat man had pulled himself up and was peering around groggily. "Y-yeah. We thought we'd-we'd grab a little sleep till you got here, Boss."

The powerfully built man advanced menacingly toward them. A look of terror crept into Louie's face, and Weeping Sam scowled blackly.

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"Where is that bag of money, Butt? Where is it, Weeping Sam?" chanted the man in costume in tones of ice.

"I-we d-d-don't know, Boss! Honest 1" the pudgy man shrieked, drawing back.

With a snarl Weeping Sam hurtled into the Boss. Both crashed to the ground with yells of rage, rolling over and over. A clawlike hand shot out and grabbed Louie's ankle. With a scream of terror the stocky man collapsed to the floor of the cave alongside the fighters.

"Now's our chance!" Frank whispered, grabbing his brother's sleeve.

Like two fleeting shadows the Hardy boys raced past the ruffians struggling in the eerie rays of flashlights, then burst into the open.

"Quick, Joe, some rocks! Here's one!"

"To seal the entrance?"

"Eight! We'll have 'em trapped in two minutes!" Frank said excitedly.



Panting heavily, the boys rolled four large boulders against the narrow entrance to the cave and wedged them tightly with small rocks. The three men inside apparently were too much engrossed in their struggle to be aware of what had happened.

"Frank, you're a genius," Joe exclaimed softly as the two stood back to admire their handiwork. "Dad will be glad to hear this."

"Thanks for the compliment," his brother laughed. "Those men are not caught yet."

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Let's go tell Dad right now and see what he wants us to do next."

"What about that other entrance? The secret one he showed us?" asked Joe. "It would be fierce if those robbers should find it and get out."

Frank shrugged. "Shucks, they'll never find it. Remember how we had to climb over a ledge even to see it?"

Back at camp Chet greeted his chums with a worried look. "Your Dad's gone, fellows. I went down the trail for some water about two hours ago and when I came back-well, he-" The stout lad stopped, his lips trembling.

"He's been kidnaped!" Joe exclaimed excitedly.

"I think not," his brother contradicted him. "Chet, how was Dad feeling when you left him? Better?"

"He said he was just about well."

"I see, Joe. I'll bet Dad took a sudden notion to get back on Beeson's trail. You know he'd be having the itch to do so."

The younger Hardy lad remained unconvinced, but the brothers agreed that their first move should be to summon aid against the gangsters sealed in the cave.

"Joe, you and Chet watch the entrance while I go down to Windham and get the troopers," Frank suggested.

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"Right," Joe nodded. "And you won't have to ask me to hurry."

Chet heaved a sigh. "Gee, I'm glad I don't have to go."

An hour and a half of alternate running and fast walking brought the older Hardy lad to Windham's ramshackle hotel, where he phoned the state police barracks located a few miles away. The officer who took the message sounded skeptical but finally agreed to send a squad of troopers to meet Frank at Windham. A short time later several men arrived.

"Are you Frank Hardy?" asked the leader, dismounting from his motorcycle outside the hotel where the boy was waiting for them.

"Yes, sir."

"Get in this sidecar. Which way do we go! Eeady, men?"

The six machines roared off, bouncing over the rocky trail with never a pause. The trooper beside Frank leaned over now and again to ply the lad with questions concerning their mission to the cave.

"It'll be a great day for you, son, if we catch Beeson and his gang," he shouted above the din.

"You'll catch them, sir," the older Hardy boy replied confidently. "They're barricaded behind the biggest rocks we could find."

"They may dig out."

"There's only enough room inside at the en-

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trance for one of them to work at a time, Officer. And one man couldn't move those boulders," Frank said.

This bit of strategy apparently pleased the trooper. He grinned and gave the jouncing cycle a fresh burst of speed.

Presently Frank motioned to the man. "We'd better stop here, sir," he said. "The cave's not far from here."

" All right, son, lead on. Fall in behind, men -single file."

Frank's pulses raced as the group neared their destination. Joe stepped from a clump of bushes.

"Everything's quiet," he announced. "Hasn't been a sound from inside since you left."

Frank introduced his brother to the head trooper.

"All right, boys, where's the cave?" queried the latter.

With Frank and Joe in the lead, they all crept through the underbrush. A moment later the older lad signaled.

"There's the entrance, Officer. See that pile of rocks over there?"

"Right. Get out your guns, men, the gang may try to rush us. Boys, can you clear away those boulders?"

Joe had disappeared for a moment to return with Chet, who had been waiting for them in

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the nearby bushes. With Frank's help they set to work feverishly.

"Gee, this is hard work," groaned Chet.

"Charley! Ed! Give the boys a hand," ordered the leader. "Watch yourselves, everyone. The gang may be waiting to plug you."

With racing pulses the Hardys and the policemen pried loose the smaller stones. A trooper stuck his flashlight into a chink and peered inside.

"Don't see anybody, Chief."

"Never mind. They may be back farther, waiting to rush us. Go ahead with the rocks."

A moment later the heavy boulders were rolled away.

"All right, men, stand aside," the head officer ordered. He raised his voice. "Come out of there, Duke Beeson!"

Silence. The officer leveled his flashlight at the dark interior.

"Your last chance, Beeson!"

There was no sound from inside, nor could anyone be seen. What could have happened?

"Charley, you and Ed and Bill have a look inside."

The policemen entered, but returned a few moments later.

"Empty, Chief," grunted Bill.

Frank's heart sank as the chief of the troopers glared at him.

"I can't understand it," said the lad.

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"You been playing pranks on the law, young fellow?"

The boys had a hard time convincing the officer that he and his brother actually had locked Beeson and two of his lieutenants inside the cave. Finally the trooper waved them aside.

"Never mind. Maybe you did, and then again maybe you boys had pie for supper and dreamed it." He looked at them sternly. "Better be careful next time. Don't pay to get the law out for no reason. Come on, men."

Heartsick, the Hardys and Chet Morton conducted a further search of the cave after the troopers had left. Nothing of significance could be found. They concluded the bandits had located the other entrance. Frank chided himself for thinking they would not do so.

"Well, that's that, I guess," he sighed at last. "There's nothing for us to do now but go back home and wait for Dad to get in touch with us. I feel sick over the whole thing."

The plan suited Chet perfectly. So great was the disappointment of Frank and Joe that they hardly spoke throughout the entire journey to Bayport. To their further dismay, no word whatever had arrived from their father. Aunt Gertrude was certain the detective had met a horrible end, and their mother was greatly worried. For hours they waited but there was no news. Finally the following evening as the

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boys were finishing supper the phone rang. Both jumped to answer it.

"It's Chet," said Joe, reaching the instrument first. "Wants us to come over. Says he has some news."

On the way to the Morton house the spirits of the boys lightened. They had learned that Callie Shaw, a special friend of Frank, would be there, as well as Chet's sister Tola in whom Joe was particularly interested. The girls listened eagerly as Frank and Joe recounted their recent adventures.

"That part about the man in the costume from India and the sun-praying people gives me an idea," Callie exclaimed. "There's a camp just a few miles from our summer home where people go around in clothes like that and worship the sun. They call themselves the Ozon-ites."

" Sounds like a fresh air camp," chided Chet.

Frank and Joe bounded to their feet at the same time. "Callie, you're a marvel!" the former exclaimed. "That's the best clue we've had yet."

Eagerly the boys besieged her with queries.

"Joe, we're heading for that place first thing in the morning!" said Frank.

"Eight! If we don't find Beeson there, or whoever that Indian at the cave was, I'll miss a good guess."

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"Take us with you!" Callie pleaded, her chum lola joining in excitedly.

"All right, we will," Frank exclaimed. "Let's see, who-I know! We'll get Aunt Gertrude to chaperon us and we'll make a party out of it!"

"Great idea," agreed Joe enthusiastically. "That is, if Aunt-----"

"Oh, she'll go," his brother said. "Aunt Gertrude doesn't want to miss anything."

The phone cut him short. Joe, who was nearest the instrument, picked up the receiver.

"Hello? Oh, hello, Aunt Gertrude. What's that? A telegram for Frank and me? Yes, you'd better read it to me."

A breathless hush fell over the room, punctuated by a loud crackle in the phone. Joe's face grew more and more serious.

"Thank you, Aunt Gertrude," he said finally. "Yes, we'll be home soon." He turned to Frank. "It's from Weeping Sam. He says to stop meddling with his affairs or take the consequences. "

## CHAPTER VIII

### A DESPERATE CHASE

"this "Weeping Sam fellow isn't going to scare us off as easily as that," Joe declared.

"I should say not," Frank agreed. "What about it, girls? Do you still want to go?"

Callie and lola, though somewhat shocked over the telegram, nodded eagerly. It was a more difficult matter to persuade Chet, but at length he relented. The brothers raced home to inform Aunt Gertrude of their plans.

"I suppose if you boys insist upon carrying out this dangerous mission I'd better go along," she said crossly. At the same time she dragged out her suitcase and began to pack.

Early next afternoon Prank had a long talk with his mother, giving her explicit directions so Mr. Hardy could find his sons if he should want them. Then he rounded up Chet and the girls in the Hardy sedan. Shortly afterward, singing and laughing merrily, the group headed for the mountains.

"It's about a two-hour drive to our cottage from here," Callie explained. "You'll love it, I'm sure. We do. Swimming and boating, horseback riding--- --"

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"Any hiking?" Chet drawled, making a wry face at the group.

The rest roared with laughter.

"Chet, I'll see to it that you don't have to do a thing but sit around and listen to the lions and tigers in the woods," Joe taunted his fat chum.

"Lions and tigers! Don't tell me-----"

"Oh, he's just teasing you, Chet," Callie laughed. "The biggest wild animal in our woods is a squirrel."

"I certainly hope so," chimed in Aunt Gertrude fervently. "I certainly shall not be interested in anything but peace and quiet on this trip. I'm depending on you young folks."

The travelers stopped for ice-cream at a road side restaurant but departed shortly afterward. At length Callie pointed to a sign.

"There's the road. Our house is about a mile back in those woods. This building here on the right is the summer theatre."

Frank nosed the car into a narrow trail.

"There's the house!" Callie pointed as they jounced along.

Through the dense thicket the brothers could see part of a large, rambling homestead.

"Look," cried Joe. "There's somebody on the front porch. A state trooper!"

Aunt Gertrude shrieked as a uniformed officer with revolver drawn came toward the car.

"What do you want?" *Joe* cried.

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"You live here?" the man queried gruffly.

Frank nodded. "We've come up for the week-end as Mr. Shaw's guests. This is Miss Shaw," he added, looking at Callie.

"Well, you'd better watch yourselves," warned the trooper. "Two tigers got away from Hank Weatherby's private zoo down the road. There are claw-prints in the mud all around your house!"

Aunt Gertrude cried out again and the girls looked at each other unhappily.

"What was that you said about lions and tigers around here, Joe?" Chet queried in a weak voice.



"Chet, you take Aunt Gertrude and the girls inside the house," Frank said crisply. "Joe and I will look around outside. Is that all right, sir?" he asked the officer.

"It's all right with me, boys, but you'd better be careful. Tigers climb trees, you know, and you haven't any guns."

It was not difficult to pick up the tracks of the wild beasts.

"Better stay with me for a while," the trooper suggested. "We'll see where this set of prints leads."

The three pressed into the underbrush, keep-ing a sharp watch both on the ground and overhead in the trees. No animals could be seen.

"Isn't there some sort of a camp of Sun Worshippers around here, Officer?" Joe in-

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quired casually as they picked their way along.

"Sun Worshippers? Oh, the Ozonites, you mean? Yes, they have a camp a couple of miles from here. Queer bunch."

"I hear their leader is an Indian Prince," Frank put in, trying to get further information, "and he gives his people lectures."

"Well, they're pretty religious, I guess," the trooper replied. "They go around with their arms up in the air half the time, prayin' to somethin' or other. I guess it's the sun. They're harmless."

The tiger tracks suddenly ended.

"That fellow must have climbed one of these trees," said the trooper. "Don't see him up there now. Let's scout around and find out where he came down."

After fifteen minutes of vain searching the man gave up.

"I'd better get back and report to the station. So long, boys. You ought to go back to your house."

Soon after the man left, Joe cocked an ear.

"Something's coming, Frank. Hear that racket in the underbrush?"

The elder lad picked up a stout tree limb and his brother did likewise. With wildly beating hearts they waited as the thrashing sound approached. Then, to their astonishment, a handsome young man in the garb of a native of India stepped from the bushes.

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"Greetings, and may the sun's rays fall upon you both," he saluted in a gentle voice. Without waiting for them to answer he continued, "I am out hunting two tigers, as it pleaseth heaven."

"So are we," Frank smiled. "We just heard that-----"

"Yes, it is true, sadly enough. The beasts have demoralized my people. Our camp is practically empty."

He swished his robe around and made some sort of a sign.

"Is your camp near here?" Joe asked.

"About half a mile, as the sunflower points. We dwell in peaceful harmony and it is a shame the tigers have escaped. Some of us may be attacked and killed before nightfall."

As the man seemed to be eager to talk, the boys took advantage of this opportunity to gather all the information they could about the strange group.

"No, we are not really from India," he told them after a question from Joe. "But we believe in the Indian philosophy of living. And like the old Egyptians we worship the sun. Our leader, Chief Shining Light, brings us a message of peace and good will each night at our meeting hall."

Joe pricked up his ears. "Will he be there tonight, sir?"

"Alas, I fear not. Our people will remain

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scattered until the tiger danger is over," the sun worshipper replied sadly.

The boys' hearts sank. A few moments' further conversation ensued, then the strange cultist bade them farewell and disappeared.

"I think we'd better get back and see if everything's all right at the cottage," Frank decided. "Besides, it's getting dark."

They were just in time. Aunt Gertrude had fainted from fright after hearing a rustling sound in the thicket a few moments before. Frantic, Chet and the girls were wondering what to do,

"Everybody calm down," Frank ordered sternly. "There's nothing to worry about. Joe, get some water from the kitchen."

The boy returned in a jiffy, and under their ministrations the old lady revived. Suddenly she sat bolt upright and glared at the young people.

"Goodness!" she cried, "take me away from this terrible place! We '11 all be eaten alive any moment!"

Frank laughed. "Now, now, Aunt Gertrude. There isn't any danger. Really, there isn't."

"No danger!" spluttered the furious woman. "No danger? With tigers roaring all about the place? You never did have any sense, Frank Hardy!"

She rocked back and forth, moaning and groaning in terror. Joe took his brother aside.

#### A Desperate Chase 69

"I'm not so sure Aunt Gertrude isn't halfway right," he said, worried. "While I was getting the water I heard something outside the kitchen window. Sounded like a growl."

"Maybe we'd better scout around again. Where's your flashlight? Tell the others we're going out for some logs to build a fire."

They tiptoed from a side door into the gathering darkness.

"I don't see anything," Frank whispered tensely.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when an, unearthly roar shattered the quiet air. Before their startled eyes sped the unmistakable figure of a man with a huge shadow bounding close behind.

"It's Dad!" Joe cried in horror.

## CHAPTER IX

### SAVED

for a split second the boys stood as if transfixed.

"Clubs!" Frank gasped. "We'll have to find some clubs!"

Quickly Joe swept the flashlight's rays over the rough ground.

"There's a good-sized stick, Frank!"

"And here's another! Come on!"

A wild thrashing sound, mingled with the unmistakable snarl of a frenzied beast, came from the gloomy thicket near by. The boys raced toward the commotion. Frank, in the lead, suddenly made out a huge form in front of him. With all his strength he swung the heavy limb.

*Whack!*

There was a ferocious roar as a giant yellow head with bared fangs whipped into the rays of Joe's light. For an instant the tiger stood dazzled.

*Whack! Wham!*

The younger Hardy lad dropped the light and lashed out with his club like a maniac. With an

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unearthly scream of rage the beast lunged. Frank dodged just as a knifelike missile ripped the sleeve of his jacket wide open.

"Look out, Joe, he's coming back!"

"I see him! I-----"

Three dull thuds sounded in quick succession, followed by a splintering crash.

"My stick's broken!" Frank yelled.

"It's all right. You got him in the head that time! Think I can finish him off."

"Hope-so," panted the older boy.

With a grinding snarl the great beast sprang again, missed Joe by inches and rolled over on the ground. With a roar it was back on its huge paws, but not before the boy had seized a sharp rock. Drawing a quick breath he hurled it with one desperate burst of strength as Frank focused the light. The burly animal crumpled in its tracks.

"Look out, Joe. He may not be dead yet," warned Frank.

"Give me your stick. I 'll poke him," said his brother.

Joe edged up and prodded the tawny body. It made no move. That last blow had been too much for it.

"Guess you finished him all right, Joe. Boy, that was some throw! You'll be joining one of the big leagues any time now!"

"Huh! He was already half dead from those tfhacks you gave him-----"

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Before he could finish Frank had disappeared in the bushes. "Joe! Quick!" he shouted suddenly.

"What's the matter?"

Their flashlights revealed a horrible sight to their eyes.

"Is Dad- f" The younger Hardy lad stared with quivering lips.

"He's-going to be-all right, I think," Frank gulped. "Golly, look at those gashes! Better get back to the house quick and bring some more handkerchiefs. We'll have to stop this hemorrhage pronto."

Joe returned in a jiffy. "I told Chet to phone for an ambulance. Dad will have to be taken to a hospital right away."

As the boys worked feverishly over the torn and battered figure of their father, a siren howled in the distance. A few moments later Chet led two white-coated figures bearing a stretcher to the scene of the mix-up.

"Good emergency bandaging, son," one of them, apparently the ambulance surgeon, said to Frank. "Clawed by a tiger, eh? Well, I think we can fix him up at the hospital."

With the boys anxiously watching their father in the stretcher compartment, the ambulance wailed its way down the mountain to a large hospital on the outskirts of a city. White-clad physicians and nurses hurried noiselessly to and fro as the boys waited in anguished sus-

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pense. Finally a doctor poked his head into the anteroom and spoke to them.

"Your father wants to see you," were his words.

Eagerly the boys went into the private room where the detective now lay in bed swathed in bandages.

"Only a word or two," cautioned a nurse.

Fenton Hardy gazed at his sons and smiled weakly. "Thanks, boys, for saving my life," he said huskily. "Got your message from Mother."

"Shucks, Dad-" Frank began, but his father held up a splinted hand protestingly.

"I know," he said. "There's still work to be done." He paused for breath. "Go-back to colony. Watch." He looked at them earnestly.

"And leave you, Dad?" Joe exclaimed in dismay.

"Yes. Those-are orders." The detective closed one eye in a long wink. "Bring my-car -here."

The nurse approached. "You'd better leave now, boys," she said.

Unwillingly they turned away and left the hospital. Frank squared his shoulders.

"Come on, let's snap out of this. Dad wants us to get busy."

"First thing to do is find out where his car is," said Joe.

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"I have a hunch it's up at the cottage," replied Frank.

"What shall we do about Aunt Gertrude and the others?"

"Phone Chet and tell him to drive them home right away. They aren't safe with tigers running around," Frank decided.

Joe got the message through at a local drug store. As he sat down beside his brother at the soda counter, he said:

"Chet was tickled to death at the idea of going home, not to mention Aunt Gertrude and the girls! And Dad's car is in front of the cottage. He must have just arrived when the tiger got after him."

"Let's have a little nourishment, then grab a taxi back to the house," suggested Frank.

The cold light of early dawn was filtering through the trees as the boys paid the cab driver and hurried up the path.

"Jumping cats, Frank, look at the mess!" said Joe as he opened the front door.

Chairs, rugs and tables were scattered about the living room in wild disarray.

"Same in the dining room, Joe. Golly, what do you suppose happened?"

The brothers looked at each other in puzzled amazement. Suddenly there was a rustling sound from the kitchen. Frank Hardy's jaw tensed.

"Trouble," he said, "out there."

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"Shall we go iiif" Joe whispered, indicating the kitchen door, which was shut.

Frank crossed the room stealthily, grasped the handle, and hesitated, every sense alert. He looked at Joe. As the latter nodded, he pulled open the door with a sudden yank.

"Look out!" yelled Joe.

A huge striped body hurtled into the room with a horrible roar and crashed against a cupboard in one corner. For a second it seemed stunned.

"Behind the table! Quick!" Frank cried.

A second later the boys had the large dining room table between the snarling beast and themselves.

"He won't stay there long, Frank. Where's something to hit him with!"

Their hearts sank as they peered about. Nothing whatsoever in the form of a weapon was available. The tiger was crouched on the floor opposite them, snarling softly.

"He's going to jump!" Frank gasped.

Wide-eyed with horror, the boys saw the beast's muscles quiver slightly and grow tense.

"Here he comes!" Joe fairly screamed.

With a blood-chilling howl the beast sprang with the speed of a cannon ball directly across the table. At the same instant there was a deafening report followed by a crash. The limp carcass of the tiger slithered into the base of the wall not six inches from where Joe lay.

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"Frank! What happened? He's dead!"

"I thought I heard a shot. The window's shattered. Somebody-Oh!"

A powerfully built man evidently from the Sun Worshippers, stepped through the broken window and surveyed the scene stolidly.

"I-I believe we owe our lives to you, sir," Prank said, pulling himself together with effort.



"We certainly do," Joe chimed in. "We're very grateful, Mr. - Mr.-----"

The man grunted indifferently, then gathered his robe about him and climbed out again. In a second he had been swallowed up in the underbrush.

"Can you beat that!" Joe stared at his brother incredulously.

Frank's face bore a peculiar expression. Something had startled him.

"Did you see what I did?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"That was Duke Beeson!"

"By golly, now that you mention it-----"

"At least if he wasn't Beeson, he was the one called Boss we saw at the cave. I'm sure of it. Looked exactly like him."

"Tell you what, Frank. Let's find that meeting-hall the other Sun Worshipper mentioned. Maybe those folks will be getting together again now that the tigers are dead."

"All right. If our friend Beeson turns out to be Chief Merry Sunshine or whatever-----"

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"Chief Shining Light," Joe Hardy corrected.

"Shining Light! That's a laugh! Death-dealing Darkness, I'd call him."

"Remember, he just saved our lives."

"That's right. Maybe he isn't the bank robber, after all."

The brothers spent the greater part of the day straightening out the Shaw residence and argu-ing over the identity of the man.

"He *must* be Beeson, Frank. Didn't Weeping Sam and Louie Butt call him 'Boss' ? Didn't they say he went around in an Indian Prince's costume? Didn't-----"

"You win," the older lad laughed finally. "Anyhow, it's growing dark. Let's get started for the meeting hall."

A half hour's trudge along a trail marked 'To Ozonite Lodge' brought them to a large, unpainted structure at one end of what appeared to be a village of wooden huts.

"Look at the mob in there, Frank," Joe exclaimed as they drew near.

"We'd better keep out of sight. They may have rules about strangers."

"There's a window behind some bushes. That ought to be a good gallery seat."

The sound of hymn singing filled the night air as the boys crossed a small clearing and crept up to a lighted window. They secreted themselves behind a cluster of foliage.

"Golly, Frank, there must be a thousand of

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'em in there! All dressed in costumes from India."

"Who's that on the platform? Joe! Isn't that the man who came to the-----"

Something snapped around the lad's neck like a steel trap.

## CHAPTER X

### TROUBLE WITH THE POLICE

"what's the idea o' spyin' around here?" hissed a voice.

The grip around Frank's neck loosened as the boy squirmed, but an ugly face leered through the dusk.

"We aren't doing any harm," Joe said, disguising his voice. "That Indian in there-*on* the platform-----"

"What about him?" snarled the voice.

"He saved our lives this morning. He killed a tiger that was springing at us and, well, we wanted to thank him."

"Huh. Are you sure that's right?"

"Of course it is," snapped Frank, likewise altering the pitch of his voice. "Find out yourself. Go ask him!"

"I believe I'll do just that," said the man, giving a low whistle.

"What do you want, Sam?" growled a heavy-set man, stepping from the near-by thicket.

"Watch these two fellows while I speak to the Boss."

"Who are they?" He squinted at them in the gloom.

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"Summer campers, prob'ly. They say the Boss saved 'em from a tiger, or some such nonsense. I'll go check up."

Frank nudged his brother almost imperceptibly and got a sign in return.

"Well," began their guard, "so you was almost ate up by a-----"

*Clump!*

Louie Butt's big jaw crashed shut under Frank's fist and the man spun away from them. The boys sprang into the thicket.

"Nice work, Frank," his brother panted as the two stumbled onto the trail over which they had come, and raced off.

"Too bad we got caught, though. We'll never find out anything about Beeson this way," the older lad said with regret.

"We'll catch up with him sooner or later. Let's make another try tomorrow night," Joe suggested.

"With Weeping Sam and Louie on watch? Shucks, we'll have to figure out a better way than that," objected Frank.

Soon the boys rounded a turn in the trail and hurried toward the Shaw cottage.

"Frank! Do you suppose Beeson might get suspicious after Sam speaks to him and come back here tonight?"

"I shouldn't be surprised. I was just wondering what we'd better do. Say, I have a» idea! A good idea!"

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"Spill it," urged Joe.

"Gallic's father is an actor in the summer theatre up here. He has a whole trunk full of costumes in the attic of the cottage."

"That's the best thought you've ever had, Frank. If Beeson should come calling he'll get the surprise of his life."

Ten minutes later the boys were rummaging eagerly through Mr. Shaw's extensive theatrical wardrobe, carefully packed away.

"How about this one, Frank? Old-time villain's outfit. Mustache and everything."

"Looks too much like a fake. We must wear something that looks real. Wouldn't do to have the Boss catch on."

"I'll say not. Here are a couple of women's outfits. How about them?"

" Now you 're talking. They look swell. Let's try 'em on."

Chuckling over their ruse, the boys hastily donned gowns and wigs. Frank stuck on a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Great Scott, Frank, I wouldn't know you from Aunt Gertrude! First time I ever noticed the family resemblance!"

"Thanks for the compliment. For that matter you look like Hard-Hearted Hannah herself ! Well, now what do we do ? "

"Nothing to do but wait for visitors, I guess. Golly, I'll be disappointed if no one shows up to pay his respects after all this trouble."

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Midnight came and went without a sign of anyone attempting to disturb them. At length Joe yawned and started for bed.

"Shucks. Let's turn in," he said.

"Might as well, I guess. Just for luck, though, we'd better wear these crazy outfits in the morning," Frank advised.

After bolting the doors and downstairs windows they tumbled into bed and slept soundly. When Frank awoke the sun was streaming through the windows. Someone was pounding on the front entrance.

"Joe! Get up, quick!"

"Who is it?"

"Don't know. Wait, I'll have a look out the window," said Frank. He hurried back, frowning. "It's the Boss! Beeson!" he reported excitedly.

"Holler out the window. Tell him we'll be right down."

Frank drew a breath and flung open the sash. In a shrill, high-pitched voice he called, "One minute, please."

A grunt sounded below and the knocking ceased. Swiftly the brothers donned their disguises. A moment later Frank pulled open the front door and a stalwart, bronzed figure entered.

"Won't you sit down?" Joe cackled. "The room is a bit untidy, I'm sorry to say-----"

"Yes, Jennie," squeaked Frank, "we must

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set about the housework today. May we do something for you, Mister-----  
-?"

"Chief Shining Light, I am called," rumbled the visitor not unpleasantly. "I-I merely came to inquire about the two young men who were here last night."

" Oh, yes. Are you the gentleman who saved them from the tiger ? How courageous of you," Frank said, throttling an impulse to burst out laughing in front of the man.

"They are our nephews, Chief Shining Light," added Joe in a cracked, feminine voice. "Darling boys, both of them. They left early this morning for Erie."

The younger Hardy lad caught himself just in time and named the first city that popped into his head.

" Erie ?" The caller's placid expression suddenly became one of sharp inquiry.

"Yes," Frank piped. "Are you acquainted in that place?"

" Why, uh, no. That is, I was planning to go there on business in a day or so. Perhaps you would like to have me pay a visit to your nephews? What is their address?"

Joe squirmed slightly. "Oh, they'll stay at the hotel there. The leading hotel. Goodness, Cynthia, I simply cannot remember the name of the hotel."

It was Frank's turn to squirm. "Isn't it ridiculous, Jennie, I have forgotten it too. Old

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age is really too awful," he cackled, turning to the Indian Prince, who eyed the two "women" sharply.

"The Lennox ? Is that the one?" he queried, never taking his gaze from them.

Frank had a sudden hunch. "No, not the Lennox. That isn't the largest hotel in Erie, is it, Chief Shining Light?" he squeaked.

Almost imperceptibly they could see the man relax. "The Brockton is probably the largest-----"

"The Brockton. That's the one," Joe exclaimed shrilly. "If you call there you may see our dear nephews. Please give them our love, won't you? The dear boys."

The chief arose. "I'll be glad to, ladies. Good day," he said.

With their visitor safely out of earshot the brothers roared with laughter until they were too weak to stand.

"Frank, that was *perfect*." Tears streamed from Joe's eyes.

" Perfect ? It was a masterpiece! We should be on the stage."

Suddenly Joe became serious. "Say, what about that Erie business? Think he might be planning a robbery there by some chance ?" the boy asked excitedly.

"I think it would be worth a trip to find out. What say?"

"Tell you what. We'll call our own bluff and

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stay at the Brockton Hotel. If Duke Beeson is really planning a robbery maybe we can spot him and spoil his plans."

As they eagerly discussed the prospects ahead, the boys rode down the mountain in their father's car which they had kept hidden in the boathouse. They left the keys with Mr. Hardy who was vastly improved. Late that night they took a train for Erie and walked into the Brockton Hotel.

"Eoom for two with bath? Yes, sirs," said the clerk at the desk.

Tingling with anticipation the brothers alternately slept and talked until morning. Seven o'clock found them already through breakfast. The day, however, passed without a sign of Beeson or his henchmen.

"Do you think we'd recognize him without his Indian Prince costume, Frank?"

"Sure. I couldn't miss that face. Looks like a mask. Hardly ever changes expression."

On the third day the younger brother impatiently jumped up from his chair in the lobby, where the boys had been sitting for a long time.

"I've had enough of this, Frank. Let's scout about town. Maybe we'll run into him. This sitting around is terrible."

"All right But wait till I tell the clerk at the desk."

Frank joined Joe a few moments later. "I

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described Beeson and told the clerk to keep him here by one means or another if he should come in while we're gone."

"Good idea. Here's Main Street. Let's see what's doing."

As the boys passed a large bank, Frank remarked, "Just the place Beeson would pick."

"Looks peaceful enough now. Maybe this is all a wild goose chase."

"Perhaps. Still, there's no harm in checking up on everything. Say, we've been out an hour. Let's go back and see if there's any news," Frank suggested.

The hotel clerk noted a memorandum on his desk.

"A gentleman answering your description just left," he said. "We couldn't hold him- he said he was in a hurry and wouldn't be able to get back. Said he was looking for two young men who live here permanently."

Frank groaned as the boys walked across the lobby.



"What dopes we are! Let him get right out of our hands. Golly!"

"If he just left maybe we can find him," urged Joe. "Come on!"

As they hurried into Main Street again a series of loud *cracks* sounded a block away.

"Guns!" Joe yelled. "Down there, toward the bank!"

There was a sudden howl of sirens as two

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radio police cars roared past them. Pedestrians were scattering in all directions.

Three roughly dressed men firing automatics back over their shoulders were running toward the boys. At the same time several policemen, having taken up the chase, were raining bullets in their direction.

"Lie down, Joe, we'll be hit!"

Instantly the boys dropped and lay motionless on the sidewalk. They could hear the thunder of feet and shouts and screams from frightened men and women caught in the melee.

Suddenly the bandits dashed into the center of the street and jumped into an automobile which was moving slowly. The driver stepped on the gas and the car sped away.

"After 'em!"

The running policeman commandeered a parked car and set off in pursuit. The machine with the siren had turned around and now took up the chase.

"Wow! The old Wild West days come to Erie!" cried Joe.

At the same instant another automobile was racing through the outskirts of the city. At the gate of an isolated cemetery on the edge of a forest the driver stopped, turned off the engine, and hurriedly dragged a huge sack into a thickly overgrown corner of the enclosure.

Peering around furtively, he began to dig rapidly with a small shovel.

# CHAPTER XI

## THE OLD MANSION

" guess the Boss will give me an extra slice for *this* job," said the man with the shovel, looking around furtively.

He laughed in a gruff sort of way and kept mumbling to himself as he dug. When the clay ground did not yield easily to his efforts he became upset. A sudden breeze springing up made him start nervously.

"A cemetery may be a good hidin' place for this stuff," he commented uneasily, "but I ain't votin' for it as a place to be alone in. Uh!"

Digging furiously, the man soon had a hole deep enough to contain the heavy sack. Quickly he pushed it in and feverishly piled the dirt on top of it.

"What's the matter with me?" he chided himself. "My knees are shaking. Aw, I'm turnin' yellow. All the jobs I've pulled and then let a cemetery get me this way."

The wind was blowing hard now. As it took off the shoveler's cap, he nearly collapsed. Eunning after it, he could hardly stand up, ha was so terror-stricken.

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"I ain't afraid of a soul on earth," he bragged," but spirits. You can't fight spirits!"

Jamming the cap on his head, he jumped into his auto and left the cemetery with all possible speed. Not until he was a mile away did he breathe easier.

Meanwhile the Hardy boys, back at the Brockton Hotel, were talking excitedly about the bank robbery. They had learned of the tremendous loss to the institution and the fact that the police had not caught any of the robbers yet.

"I wish I could have got a glimpse at the faces of the two bandits who passed us," said Frank. "Did you see them?"

"No," Joe replied, "I kept as close to the sidewalk with my face down as I possibly could. Wow! That was some fight."

"Suppose we go to Headquarters and tell our suspicions," suggested Frank. "Dad expects us to carry on while he's laid up."

"Good idea," agreed Joe. "Only if I knowr Dad, he won't let that hospital keep him long."

The brothers hurried to the station house but could get no attention at first. The whole force was so busy with the recent happenings that they had no time for a couple of schoolboys. Desperate, Frank spoke again to a sergeant at the door and handed the man his letter of identification.

"Please read this," the famous detective's son pleaded. "It is very important."

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Grudgingly the man consented. Looking at the message, he said, "Never heard o' Fenton Hardy. G'wan along wid yez now. Scram. You're a nuisance, wait a minute. Fenton Hardy. Not *Fenton* Hardy?"

The boys barely could suppress smiles, but kept serious countenances as the sergeant led them to an inner room. There he introduced them to an officer, who stopped his work and listened attentively to their story.

"You say Duke Beeson, the former racketeer has switched to bank hold-ups," he said as they concluded, "and that he was in this town at the time of the robbery?"

"We have never actually heard this man called anything but Boss," Joe replied, "but Dad thinks he is Beeson and we're sure of it."

"Sorry to hear your father is in the hospital," the officer said, rising to usher the lads out. "Remember me to him and thanks for the tip. I'll get busy on it right away. Good-bye."

"Now what?" Joe wondered as the brothers reached the street.

"I've an idea. Let's hire one of those 'drive 'em yourself cars and go for a ride. Maybe We'll see something interesting."

" Not much chance now. Beeson and his gang wouldn't be hanging around *this* city. But I'll go if you say so."

Frank took the wheel of the rented roadster and they headed for the suburbs.

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"Look at that old country road, Frank. Let's see where it goes."

Several minutes of jouncing brought them to the edge of a forest. Joe suddenly caught his brother's arm.

"Isn't that a car up ahead? Looks as if it's stuck."

"What a place to be stuck-right by a cemetery."

"Don't see anybody around."

"Guess the driver gave up and walked. Probably got scared when he saw the storm coming."

The rumble of thunder sounded ominously in the distance. Almost at the same instant there was a loud *bang* from the rear. Both boys jumped.

"Another bank robbery?" asked Joe.

"Sounded like it!" Frank laughed. "But I'm afraid it's only a flat tire."

"Must be a jinx around here. Everybody seems to get stranded."

Before they were halfway through the task of changing the tire the wind sprang at them with galelike force. Great pellets of rain dropped in volleys, and daggers of lightning jabbed the horizon ceaselessly. The boys dropped their tools and huddled under the leaky top.

" Golly, this is the blackest storm I ever saw, Frank."

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"It's black, all right, except when the lightning-Joe! Did you see that ?"

"Looked as if somebody were running. There he goes! Past that tombstone!"

"Jumping blazes! Do you suppose he's a grave robber?"

"Either that or he's plumb crazy. There he is again!" yelled Joe.

"Let's follow him! Come on!"

Flipping up their coat collars, the brothers leaped into the deluge and together raced for the shelter of the nearest tree. Every few seconds lightning flashes would illuminate the rows of tombstones. It was a strange sight.

In the midst of the weird scene a hunched-over figure was dashing about aimlessly. He was not a hundred yards from where the boys were watching.

"He's coming this way, Frank!"

"Yes-no, he isn't. He has a shovel. He's digging!"

Suddenly there was a blinding flash followed instantly by a deafening crash of thunder. The two boys crumpled into the mud at their feet, stunned by the lightning.

"Ha-ha-ha!" shrieked a voice wildly. "Hide it from me, will they! I'll show them! I'LL SHOW THEM!"

The voice rose to an unearthly scream that blended with the wail of the wind. At the same time the strange hunched figure swayed rhyth-

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mically, and scoopfuls of mud flew in all directions.

"I must hurry! I must-----"

"Frank! Where are you!" asked Joe, shaking his head groggily.

"Eight here, I think. What hit us?"

"Must have been lightning. It was, Frank. It struck that tree. Boy, that was a close call!"

His brother nodded.

"I'll say. Golly, I can't stand up. My legs are as wobbly as two completely worn-out toothpicks."

"Mine too. Say, look! That fellow is still over there!" said Joe.

"He's pulling something out of the hole! He's lugging it away. Come on, let's go after him!" urged Frank.

Still weak from the shock, the brothers staggered across the drenched cemetery in the direction which the retreating figure had taken.

"Joe, I've a hunch we've seen that man before," Frank panted. "He looks very familiar."

"I was thinking that too, but I can't place him. Can't see him very well, for that matter. Maybe-----"

Joe could not finish the sentence, for a sudden blow over the ear, dealt from behind, sent the lad reeling. Frank whirled about just in time to see the giant figure of a man dressed like an Indian Prince lunge at him. Like e.

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flash the boy swung his fist but the blow went wide. An instant later two iron hands clutched his neck.

"Hold on, Frank, I'll fix him!"

Joe flung himself at their assailant, whose grip on Frank loosened for a second. The older boy whipped about and sent a stunning blow to the man's square chin, followed by a terrific jab to his cheek.

"That got him, Frank. Wait-he's still conscious. Look out for that gun!"

Joe leaped at their adversary just as the man leveled an automatic at Frank. The gun exploded harmlessly in mid-air for the boy had sent it spinning.

"All right, I give up," snarled the man. "What do you wish me to do!"

Frank picked up the gun

"You're going to Police Headquarters, Chief Shining Light," he said in triumph.

"Very well. But so long as I have been captured perhaps you will grant me a favor," the bandit returned. I-someone buried some, uh, some of my personal possessions for safekeeping here in the cemetery. Perhaps you will allow me to see if they are still here and safe."

"Where are they?" Joe queried suspiciously.

"Over there by that tombstone. If you will follow me I shall-----"

He advanced a few feet, then stopped in his tracks with a snarl.

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"What is the matter!" asked Joe.

"That hole! Did you dig that hole? Did you steal my-did you dig something up?" the man cried.

"What if we did?" Frank asked icily. "It so happens, though, that we haven't been doing any digging."

"Must have been one of your friends, Chief," Joe said breezily. "There was a fellow here about half-an-hour ago-----"

"Adar!" hissed the man in the long, bedraggled robe. "He will pay for that! And so will you!"

As he glared menacingly at them, both boys started in surprise at the sound of the familiar name.

"Never mind about that," Frank said sternly. "You can do your threatening in court, Duke Beeson."

His heart leaped as the fellow gave a telltale wince.

"Come on," said Joe. "Let's get him back to town."

Together the brothers marched the disguised racketeer to the highway, where Frank in a few minutes flagged a passing car.

"What ya want?" growled the driver, squinting at them through the gloom.

"Can you take us to town? It's urgent. We have a dangerous criminal here," Joe explained.

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As the boys walked up to the vehicle the driver focused a flashlight on them and uttered a low exclamation.

"Sure thing, fellows," he said with sudden enthusiasm. "Hop right in the rear with your man."

Frank felt a sudden prickly sensation along his spine as they stepped into the car behind the bogus Indian Prince. A second later he felt the cold steel of a gun barrel in his chest.

"All right, you two young whippersnappers, just sit where you are and don't move," said a heavy, hoarse voice.

A light flicked on and to their astonishment and dismay the Hardys saw three ruffians with leveled automatics glaring at them from the front seat.

"Glad to see you, Boss," said one, looking at his chief. "Guess we got here just in time. Where to, Boss?"

"Proceed to Adar's mansion," ordered the Indian Prince coolly. "These youngsters said that Adar dug up the loot a short while ago," he added in an even, dangerous tone.

"Hah!" exclaimed the driver, an ugly fellow with a scarred face. "So Adar is meddling with us too, eh?"

"But not for long," said the chief in a low, menacing voice.

"I catch on, Boss," rasped one of the men.

"Those who interfere with us usually suf-

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fer," hissed the leader venomously. "Do you hear that, young fellows!"

He eyed the boys through narrowed lids. As the brothers waited with straining eyes, the car lurched crazily. Their hearts sinking, they noted that they had entered a lonely, heavily-wooded lane.



Presently the auto turned into a narrow, rutted path and jerked to a stop. Flashes of lightning revealed a gloomy house half hidden in the dense thicket.

## CHAPTER XII

### LOST TIME

the driver switched off the ignition and the lights of his car.

"How're we going to get in, Beeson?"

Worried as the Hardy boys were, they were elated and excited to hear this name spoken. So their suspicions were correct! They looked at each other, eyes sparkling, but dared give no sign they were thrilled. Another ruffian on the front seat spoke up.

"This Adar fellow may have some of his crazy inventions around to catch us."

The man in costume scowled. "Shut up, all of you, and follow me. Eunt, you keep these smart young men between yourself and the rest of us."

A squat, horrid-looking roughneck pushed the boys out of the car. "Get goin', you two. Follow the others! And don't try nothin' funny," he commanded.

As the strange callers sloshed through the mud toward the rambling mansion a hunched-over, bewiskered old man who was inside the building was rubbing his gnarled palms to-

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gether in fiendish glee. He put out the lights in the oddly littered room where he stood.

"Hah, ghosts! Do I hear ghosts? The rain drips, drips, but I hear squashing sounds," he babbled. "Squashing sounds mean ghosts. Hah!"

He peered closely at a panel of strange-looking switches and criss-crossed wires on a heavy wooden table.

"Let me see, perhaps I shall press this button. No, I shall twist that knob. The question is, shall we have fire-or ice-or ghosts? Ha-ha-ha! We shall

have fire or ice-but no ghosts! No, sir. Ghosts steal money. But no ghosts will steal *my* money!" The shrill voice rose to a scream of ecstasy.

The little man darted excitedly about the room. Suddenly he flipped a large switch and a strange whirring sound rattled the windows.

"Ice! Ice for the ghosts!" cackled the weird creature. "And then I shall count the money."

The babbling died away as the long-nailed fingers curled over another switch.

"Pull open that door," whispered Beeson.

"I don't want to go in there, Boss," whined one of the men, cringingly. "They're all sorts o' yarns about people never comin' out o' this place alive."

*Crack.* Beeson's palm resounded against the man's grizzled face.

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"That's for cowards. Follow me, all of you."

By the eerie glow of pocket flashlights the group surged inside, Frank and Joe forced along roughly by the gorilla-like henchman behind them. A short corridor led them to another door, which opened into a strange room. Suddenly a beam of light shone on them. In a moment Beeson crumpled to the floor.

"What's th' matter1?" exclaimed the man who had driven the car. "Look at 'im, guys, he's froze! Ice is formin' all over 'im! What-" The speaker himself dropped with a thud.

"Joe! I-I feel queer!" Frank whispered. His voice sounded far away.

"So do I. Maybe-----"

Without another sound the boy fell into a corner. His brother felt his knees weakening.

"Hah! Just look at that, now!" cackled a voice from a narrow stairway. "Six ghosts! Six frozen ghosts! Humph. Two young ones. Pretty young to be ghosts, but it's never too early to be covered with a nice layer of ice-----"

Babbling and chuckling to himself, the queer man clumped up the steps.

"Hah! Ice is forming all over them, so I'll just count the money," he went on, reaching the dingy room again. "Ice is forming ail over, ice is-----"

"-forming all over. Ice is formin' alJ

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over 'im. Ice is-" Joe Hardy suddenly sat up.

"Golly, what a dream! Frank! "Wake up! We're drifting!"

The sun was shining brightly.

" Wh-wh-why, we 're in a rowboat! How 'd we get here? Golly, I feel funny."

" That's putting it mildly," said Joe. " What river is this, anyhow? Did we come out for a row?"

Frank blinked. He was greatly puzzled.

"I don't remember anything like this," he said. "Let's see, weren't we in a cemetery somewhere ?"

"That's it! I remember now. And we caught Beeson."

"That's right. Then what happened? Oh, we got caught ourselves. I know! Beeson and his gang took us to an old house."

"Adarrs house, they told us it was. Some of them were afraid to go in; they said that Adar was a crazy inventor."

"And a dangerous one," Frank reminded his brother. "Beeson was frozen, Joe. Remember when he fell down? I guess we were frozen, too. I remember feeling a little chilly, and then-well, everything went black." He shivered as he thought of it.

"The whole thing is blamed queer if you ask me, Frank." Joe shuddered. "Let's find out where we are and get out of here."

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"I second the motion. If Adar moved us here by some of his magic there's no telling where he'll move us next if we don't do something."

Frank rowed quickly to the bank of the stream. A short walk brought the brothers to the center of the town they had visited before. There they learned the day of the week and found they apparently had been unconscious nearly thirty-six hours. Then they inquired the way to their home and were just in time to catch a bus for Bayport. The Hardy family and Chet, relieved, welcomed them eagerly.

"You fellows must have gone to sleep in some haystack and dreamed all that," Chet scoffed as the brothers concluded their account in the living room.

"I *knew* something terrible would happen when I saw Adar at the Bayport station," Aunt Gertrude burst out. "I think you boys had better stay home after this. With so much energy you might do a little work around here."

Fenton Hardy, except for a few remaining scratches, had practically recovered from the tiger's attack. He looked at his sons with an expression of interest as well as pride.

"Boys, I think you've started on the trail of something a whole lot bigger than I suspected it was going to be. I've heard of this Eben Adar before, but I never thought he was mixed up with Beeson."

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"I think we ought to go back there, Dad," Joe burst out eagerly. "Maybe he's keeping Beeson and the others prisoners."

"Sure thing," Frank agreed.

As the phone bell jingled, Joe arose to answer it. He came back in a moment.

"It was Weeping Sam. I recognized his voice!" the lad reported in a voice which quivered with excitement. "He wanted to know if Beeson were alive or dead. Said that if he finds out that his Boss has been killed our house is going to be blown up!"

CHAPTEE XIII

## A STRANGE GHOST

"I don't know what the rest of you are going to do but *I* am leaving! I've had all I want of these strange happenings and I don't intend to be blown up!"

Aunt Gertrude rose from her chair, threw her knitting aside, and flounced from the room. The boys smiled knowingly. Their father, however, did not smile. He appeared to be deep in thought. It was evident he did not know his older sister had left.

"Boys, this situation is no joke," he said gravely after a few moments. "Beeson and his men apparently know every move we make. They've developed a grapevine system of watching that I'm afraid will be hard to beat."

"They must have spies all over," Frank agreed. " Still, the men in the gang apparently don't know what has happened to their chief."

"That's right," added Joe.

"They don't know now," the detective speculated, "but it's only a question of a short time before they will."

Joe sat on the edge of his chair. "Then

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what we ought to do is to go back to Adar's house quickly and try to capture Beeson before he gets away," the lad said excitedly.

Fenton Hardy nodded. "Exactly. Still, there may be other important evidence to be obtained from their camp in the mountains. I propose to start back there immediately."

"And we'll return to Adar's!" Frank exclaimed. "Good! Boy, what excitement!"

After a detailed discussion of their plans the detective left on a night train. His sons set out early the next morning for what they knew would be a dangerous mission.

"I shall not be here when you return," Aunt Gertrude declared as they started off in their car. "And for that matter I should not be one bit surprised if you boys meet a terrible fate." She slammed the front door of the house.

"Nice send-off," Frank grunted as they headed the roadster for the open highway. "I wonder if she'll really leave."

"Poor Aunt Gertrude! Even if she should go, I'll bet she'll be waiting for us when we get back."

On the outskirts of Bayport the brothers stopped to pick up Chet, who had allowed himself to be persuaded to accompany them. Although he disliked the thought of possible danger, the Morton boy often let his curiosity get the better of him when the brothers incited him on their mystery solving journeys.

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"Golly, there's Aunt Gertrude," Joe exclaimed as they drove past the depot a few minutes later. "Do you suppose she's really leaving?" He laughed aloud.

Frank nosed the car alongside the platform.

"Hello, Aunt Gertrude!" he called. "«Where are you going?"

The woman looked at them sheepishly.

"Why, I-I have some shopping to do in Bristol. I expect to be back by night. I hope you boys have given up your silly adventuring."

"Not quite, Aunt Gertrude," Frank laughed. "We're on our way to Mr. Adar's ice plant. Pretty warm today. Thought we'd cool off."

"I suppose you think it a joke to be frozen into unconsciousness! Gracious I"

"Why, it's wonderful, Aunt Gertrude! Makes you feel like new," said Joe. "It really does, doesn't it, Frank?"

"I don't know why it should, but I've been feeling better than usual ever since that freezing," his brother replied. "If it works that way with everybody I don't see why it couldn't be used on sick people."

"Nonsense! Such talk I never did hear," scoffed Aunt Gertrude. "I'm beginning to think you boys are a mite touched in the head. Why don't you—oh, goodness, there comes my train. I must hurry!"

Joe assisted the nervous woman onto the

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coach and returned to the car. A moment later the three boys were rolling along at a good clip toward the town of Erie.

"Hey, fellows. We forgot to bring along some sandwiches," Chet Morton suddenly burst out. "I'm hungry already."

"Jumping Ned, can you beat that!" Joe grimaced. "Chet, don't you ever get filled up?"

"There's a hamburger shack ahead," Frank announced. "Chet, go in and buy yourself a couple of dozen. We won't be having a regular meal for a while yet, you know. In fact, you better buy some extras for us."

The plump boy reddened, but lost no time in jumping out as Frank brought the car to a stop. A few minutes later he climbed back with a large bag in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

"Thought you fellows might be interested in this." He pointed to a large headline.

"'Police Search for Duke Beeson Futile,'" Joe read aloud. "Hmmm. He's either frozen or he's back in the mountains playing Indian Prince again to his Sun Worshippers."

Frank put on more speed. "It won't be long before we'll find out, if we can locate Adar's place."

"We'll find it one way or another," Joe said. "It's not very far from the cemetery."

"Cemetery!" blinked Chet. "Don't tell me

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we have to be around cemeteries!" the stout lad shivered.



"Wait till Chet sees Adar's house in those woods," Joe taunted. "He won't mind a little thing like a cemetery after that."

Shortly after supper, which the boys ordered at an Erie restaurant, Frank headed the car through the outskirts of town. Presently Joe spied a row of tombstones among some tall trees ahead.

"There it is. Now what?"

"Couldn't see much the last time we were here on account of the storm but I think we took that old road," said Frank, pointing toward a narrow, pitted lane that led into thick woods. A moment later when they arrived at a fork in the road, he stopped the car.

"I've got a hunch we go left, Joe."

"You can't prove it by me," said his brother. "Wait, there comes somebody."

An old man trudged toward them.

"Pardon me, sir, can you tell us if there is a man named Adar living around here?" Joe asked.

"Hey? What's that?" cackled the old fellow. "Is there a bear around here?"

"Adar. A man named Adar!" Frank shouted, when he realized the stranger was deaf.

"Oh, Adar! Yep, there be. He lives down the road a piece-down here to the right. But

A Strange Ghost 10{«

ye'd better keep away from that place. It'e ha 'nted," he warned the boys.

As he shook his head at them, Chet's face turned white as a sheet.

"Golly, fellows, I-I think we'd better s-s-stay in Erie tonight."

"Mighty good idea," croaked the stranger. "Don't pay to fetch up with lunatics. That's what Eben Adar is-a lunatic. Crazy as a magpie. Thinks

there's ghosts around 'im an' sets traps f 'r 'em," the old man added mysteriously.

"Traps? What sort of traps?" Joe asked curiously.

"All kinds. Mostly electric ones. Better be keerful, young fellers-he may think ye're ghosts. I'm warnin' you. Good day."

Without further ceremony he turned and trudged off. Frank switched on the engine and started the car down the lane.

"Guess I'll have to turn on the lights," he said. "It's getting dark fast."

"We'd better park the car before we get there, don't you think?" asked Joe.

"Eight. I believe we're almost there now."

Chet's teeth were chattering. "You fellows can do what you please, but I'm not going into any houses around here. Not on your 1-1-life I" he concluded.

"I think the place is just around that curve," Frank said softly. "We'll stop here." As the

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boys tumbled out he added, "Got your flashlight, Joe 7 You '11 need it."

" Yes. But I think we 'd better not use it until we have to," his brother replied.

Chet hung back. "Honest, fellows, I-----"

"Oh, come on, Chet," Frank said crossly. "Nothing will happen. We're only going to look around."

Despite the older Hardy lad's attempt to make light of the possibility of danger the brothers filed ahead with pounding hearts. As they crept around the bend in the path Frank stopped. He was bewildered.

"I don't see the house, Joe."

"There it is. Through those trees. Looks like a big shadow."

"Oh, yes. I see it now. Not a light in the place," said Frank.

" Maybe Adar left. Are you all right, Chet f" Joe looked back over his shoulder.

"I-I g-guess so," was the feeble response. Suddenly the fat lad screamed. " Look!" \*

The boys stopped dead in their tracks, as a ghostly human figure appeared from behind a large tree. Without a sound it glided slowly and steadily toward the youths.

"Down!" Frank whispered frantically. "Get down, fellows!"

As he and Joe dropped flat on their stomachs there was a wild thrashing in the near-by thicket. Chet had left!

A Strange Ghost 111

"Can't say I blame him much," whispered Prank. " Look, the thing has stopped coming."

"Still staring at us, though. It sort of shines, doesn't it?" said Joe.

"I've a hunch it's sort of an electric gadget. Maybe we walked over a hidden switch or something," speculated Frank.

"It's gone!"

"Went out like a light! Joe, sure as shooting it was some sort of a thing to scare away people."

"Golly, do you suppose we'll be electrocuted if we go any closer 1"

" No, not that bad. We came out alive before. I'll take the chance if you will."

"O.K. Let's get started."

Crawling on hands and knees, the Hardys came to within a few feet of the silent house.

"Safe so far," said Joe.

" Let's try a door," suggested Frank. " That side one."

"I think a window might be safer. Here's one. Stay there till I give it a shove."

Peering around in the darkness Joe saw no one. He quickly crept up to a large, screened window near by. Frank saw his brother straighten up slowly and reach out one hand.

There was a sudden spurt of flame, accompanied by a sharp *crackle*. Joe crumpled to the ground.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MYSTERIOUS WIZARD

Just as Frank bounced to Ms brother's side the younger lad shook his head groggily and sat up.

"Boy, that one knocked me out for sure. For goodness' sake, Frank, don't touch those window screens," he begged his brother.

" Don't worry! How do you feel ?" the older boy asked anxiously.

" I 'm all right now. Do you suppose anybody heard us ? " Joe whispered.

He and Frank strained eyes and ears in the blackness.

"Either Adar's not home or he's waiting to see what we'll do next," the latter said tensely. "Question is, how are we going to find out?"

"Shucks, let's go up to the front door and knock. There's no law against that," Joe urged. "We came to do a job. Let's do it."

"Adar's not the sort of man who'd concern himself with laws. Still, it might be worth a try," Frank decided.

Gingerly he extended a foot toward the front porch steps.

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The Mysterious Wizard HE

" I suppose these are all wired too," he said.

"Careful! Ah!"

Joe heaved a sigh of relief when his brother's foot came to rest without injury. The old steps creaked alarmingly as the boys climbed to the big veranda.

"Careful of the doorknob, Frank. Sure as shooting it's charged," Joe prophesied.

"We should have picked up a stick to work with. That would protect us," said Frank.

"I'll get one."

Joe was in the very act of turning about when there was a sharp rattling sound and the massive front door grated open.

"Who's there?" demanded a shrill voice, as a light shone in their faces.

"Uh, are-are you Mister Adar?" Frank queried, trying to hide his surprise at the reception.

As their eyes grew accustomed to the glare the boys saw a heavily-whiskered face with two luminous eyes peering at them.

"Yes, I'm Eben Adar. And I'd like to know what brings you young whelps out here in the middle of the night ? Answer me!"

"We're sorry to disturb-----"

"Never mind that-never mind!" spluttered the eccentric through his beard. "What are you doing here, I asked you?"

"We came for the money," Frank stated in a deliberate voice.

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For a moment there was dead silence.

"Money? What money? Come, what are you talking about?" the man urged.

"The money you dug up in the cemetery," Joe cut in flatly.

The old man studied the boys closely. At length he cleared his throat.

"What do you know about that? Who are you, anyhow?" he demanded.

"I'm Frank Hardy. This is my brother Joe. We're sons of Fenton Hardy, the detective. You may remember him."

"Fenton Hardy? Hmmm. Now, what about this money?"

Frank drew a newspaper clipping from his pocket.

"The Erie bank was robbed of fifty thousand dollars on Tuesday, sir. We have reason to believe that the money was buried in the cemetery by the thieves and that you dug it up before they thought it safe to return there."

"Hmmm. Fifty thousand, eh? Well, supposing I did? How did I know the money belonged to some bank?"

"You didn't know that, of course, sir," the older Hardy lad said calmly. "We thought, though, that you would wish to return it now that we have given you this information."

"Hmmm. Of course, of course. In fact, we shall proceed at once. Have you a car? Come in a moment. I must get the sack."

### The Mysterious Wizard 115

Eagerly the brothers accepted the invitation. They wondered if Beeson and his henchmen were still unconscious in the strange room in the basement. They filed into a large, gloomy living room filled with old-fashioned furniture, barely discernible in the dimness.

"One moment till I find the correct switch!"

The old man pressed a mechanism on the wall and to the boys' openmouthed astonishment chairs and tables began to glow weirdly.

"Please sit down. I shall be with you in a moment," he said.

As he departed through a small doorway at one end of the room, Frank craned his neck.

"That place back there looks like a bed chamber," he whispered as the door swung shut. "Everything was glowing in there, too. Golly, what a place."

"I'd give a million dollars to be able to look around. Let's take the chance," suggested Joe.

Frank shook his head. "We'd better wait. No telling what might happen. Let's get on the good side of the old codger first, and then-----"

Suddenly the door swung open again and the elderly man entered, wearing a battered hat and raincoat. He was carrying a sack.

"Oh. I must set my switches before we leave. Excuse me again."

He disappeared around a corner.

"Frank, did you look in that room behind the door when he came out?" asked Joe.

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His brother looked mystified. "Yes, and it seemed entirely different. Not like a bedroom at all."

"Looked like a laboratory to me, Frank. Kows of tables and bottles and things. How do you figure that out?"

"Craziest place anyone could imagine. Ssssh. Here he comes," warned the older boy.

The stairs rattled as the hunched-up figure came down and returned to the living room.

"All ready, boys."

When they reached the city Frank stopped the car at a drug store. Joe ran inside. Learning from the proprietor the name of the president of the Erie Bank, he telephoned the official.

"Mr. Moller will be waiting for us when we get to the bank," the youth reported, jumping back into the car.

A quarter of an hour later Adar and the Hardys rolled up to the curb before the structure. A cordon of police officers awaited them.

"Eight this way," ordered one guard.

The three were ushered into a private office where a distinguished-looking man was sitting.

"This is indeed a surprise," he exclaimed. "Wonderful news."

"I am delighted to be able to return your money," Adar said pleasantly. "I happened to find it in the corner of a cemetery where I frequently visit the graves of relatives."



The official eyed the old man sternly. "Per-

The Mysterious Wizard 117

haps you will be so kind as to furnish proof of your story, sir. Naturally we must inquire into-----"

"Of course, of course," Adar gesticulated. "These young men here will answer your doubts, I am sure."

Frank revealed his own and Joe's identity and substantiated the story. When he had finished the bank president beamed at the two boys.

"You shall be rewarded amply in the very near future. Thank you so much!"

Shaking hands with him, the boys and Adar left. Frank headed for the old man's home.

"If you will pardon me, boys, I think I shall have a brief nap," their passenger said, stretching himself out in the back seat.

Soon he was snoring. The boys talked of various matters, then Joe said:

"You know, Frank, he doesn't sound very crazy to me."

"I was just thinking that, Joe. People probably don't understand him. For all we know he may be a great inventor or scientist. I have a hunch he is."

"I agree," said his brother. Just because he looks funny is no reason-----"

"Ghosts!" squeaked a voice. "Ghosts again! I shall have to press the switches."

The brothers looked at each other question-ingly. What was the matter?

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"Is something wrong, Mr. Adar?" Joe queried nervously.

"What's that? Something wrong? Why, no. Nothing but the ghosts, I shall have to dispose of them."

The old man's voice rose to a loud wail. Joe clutched his brother's arm.

"Maybe we'd better stop, Frank."

" That might make him worse. We 're almost there, anyhow."

"Boys, how would you like to see some secrets? Some wonderful secrets! Ah, my laboratory. It is unmatched anywhere in the world! I can destroy ghosts too. Ha-ha-ha!"

The man's cackling laughter sent chills over the brothers. Frank stepped on the gas.

"We'd like to see your laboratory very much, Mr. Adar," he said over his shoulder.

"Ha-ha-ha-you would like to see my laboratory! Switches, wires, fire, ice. Ice! Are you afraid of ice ? Ha-ha-ha!"

Joe whispered into his brother's ear. "Thank goodness he doesn't recognize us. If he should, we 'd be worse off than ever, I '11 bet."

"Sssh. He might get suspicious if we talk," Frank breathed from the side of his mouth and Joe agreed.

Scarcely had the words been spoken though, when a bony hand clutched his shoulder. Then a blood-curdling shriek rent the air.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LISTENING EAB

joe seized the old man's arm.

"Look here, Mr. Adar-----"

The lad gave a yelp as two rows of sharp teeth clamped shut over his wrist. The car swung crazily as Frank's eyes left the road for an instant to see what was the matter.

"Let go, you-----!"

Joe hurled himself over into the rear seat and tore his arm free. A second later he had his eccentric assailant secure in a tight hammer lock.

"Let me go I Let me go, young man! I shall not harm you!"

Frank slid the car to a stop, jumped out and got in beside his brother. Eben Adar was whimpering pitifully.

"Better let him go now, Joe," Frank advised. "I think he'll be all right."

Cautiously the younger boy loosened his hold. The old man drew a deep breath and looked at the brothers placidly.

"We should be nearing home now, shouldn't we?" he asked innocently, even smiling a bit.

Frank and Joe exchanged significant glances.

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Whatever fit had seized this strange person was over for the moment.

"Yes, Mr. Adar, we'll be there in fifteen minutes," said Joe. "Go ahead, Frank, I'll stay in the back seat," he added significantly.

"You know," the old man began as they roared off again, "I have a great secret you young men might be interested in. Most young men like

inventions."

"That so?" Joe watched the man intently, ready for another outburst.

"Yes, indeed. Wait till we arrive at my house," the scientist went on. "You shall see wonder upon wonder. Perhaps even a ghost. But I have one great secret-----"

He lapsed into silence and did not speak again until Frank halted the car in front of the lonely mansion.

"Thank you, boys," said Adar. "Thank you for your trouble. Good night."

He turned and hurried toward the porch. The boys looked at each other.

"We can't let this chance go by, Frank!" the younger lad whispered frantically.

"I'll say not. Oh, Mr. Adar! Mr. Adar!" cried Frank as he raced after the retreating figure.

"Well?"

"I-we wondered if you would be so kind as to give Joe and me a drink of water?"

The Listening Ear 121

"Certainly. Certainly. Come right in."

He unlocked four gadgets on the heavy oak door and pushed it open. With hearts skipping beats the boys entered.

"You shall have water such as never before have mortals tasted," cackled the man mysteriously. "Wait!"

He hurried down the hall and disappeared around a corner.

"Think we'd better drink it?" suggested Joe.

"Wait till we see it. Maybe we'll have to!" Frank replied meaningly.

A door opened and Adar hurried in carrying two large tumblers full of a colorless sparkling liquid.

"Drink this, boys, and you will know one of my secrets. At least you will *feel* one of them," he added.

The brothers looked at their host suspiciously. The old man's eyes were fairly popping with excitement.

"Go ahead, drink! What are you standing therefor?"

Frank took a tentative sip. Joe, watching his brother, followed suit.

"Drink! Drink it all! You will be amply rewarded!" Adar screamed at them.

Frank summoned his courage and downed the draught at a gulp. Joe did likewise.

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"Say, I-I feel-wonderful!" said Frank a few moments later.

"I feel as if I were walking on air. Golly, what was in that stuff anyhow, Mr. Adar? Tasted like ordinary water, but Jumping Jonah, what a kick!"

"Aha!" Adar rubbed his hands together gleefully. "I told you so! I said you would *feel* one of my secrets. Ah! Now I must show you something else. Come!"

Excitedly the Hardys followed the strange wizard down the hall, around a corner and into a large, well-lighted room. A row of potted flowers lined one wall.

"Notice that there is no earth in the pots, young men. My flowers grow by electricity!" the scientist boasted.

The brothers gasped in astonishment.

"Look at the size of them," said Frank.

"They're giants," agreed Joe. "What about those chickens over there, Mr. Adar?" he asked, noticing some hens in a wire enclosed alcove.

"Aha, another one of my secrets. Not my *big* secret-no. But a mighty fine one. My chickens, boys, lay five times as many eggs as ordinary chickens."

"Five times-!" Joe exclaimed.

"Absolutely! You see these hens have been placed in electrically wired cages. The magnetic field so generated is responsible for the

The Listening Ear 123

flow of electrons," lie explained. "But then you lads would not be interested in technicalities. Listen!"

He switched off a large dynamo at one end of the room. Instead of the steady whir of the engine they now heard a series of strange snapping noises. The Hardys felt queer sensations along their spines.

"Look at the windows, young men," croaked the inventor. "Look at the screens over the windows. Did you ever see anything like that?"

Tiny spurts of flame leaped up at irregular intervals.

"What-?" Joe began wonderingly.

"Bugs. Gnats. Flies," explained Adar. "Anything, in fact. Anything that touches my screens is electrocuted at once. Anything, that is, except humans. They are only shocked."

"Why are you so kind to humans?" Frank could not refrain from asking ironically.

"Aha-you are curious," said the old man, his eyes gleaming frantically. "I have other devices reserved for human intruders who try to disturb me. For ghosts, especially!"

At that moment a peal of thunder rolled across the sky and shook the house. Adar peered curiously from a window.

"It will be a bad storm," he prophesied. "You will have to stay here for the night. It would be highly dangerous to traverse even so

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short a distance as from my front door to yoni car in a lightning storm."

"May I ask why?" Joe inquired.

"You may be electrocuted instantly, young man. The electronic interchange between the magnetic field I have cast about the house-but enough. You must be hungry. I shall bring food."

He led the brothers back to the living room, bade them sit down and scurried through a doorway. Joe looked at his brother tensely.

" Shall we stay, Frank?"

"If what he says is true-and it probably is-we 'd better!"

"Let's ask him about Beeson."

"He might have another brain storm if we do, Joe. Tell you what. Let's play innocent and search the house after he's asleep."

"Good idea."

In a room above them stood the old man. A slow smile spread over his wrinkled face. His gnarled fist eagerly clutched an instrument resembling a telephone receiver.

"So!" cackled his voice softly. "That's very interesting. Very interesting indeed. How fortunate that my genius has enabled me to develop this highly efficient device for hearing significant conversations in distant parts of my house. Ha!" he concluded, rubbing his hands.

In the living room Frank pursed his lips,

The Listening Ear 12?

"I still can't understand why the place behind that door," he indicated the spot, "looked like a bedroom first and a laboratory two minutes later."

"There's one good way to find out. Let'u look in there," said his brother.

Joe crossed the floor. Just as he placed his hand on the doorknob of the mysterious room Adar walked in bearing a loaded tray.

"Bacon, eggs, coffee, toast-everything you want, young men. All cooked instantly in my electronic kitchen," he boasted.

Hungry as wolves, the brothers lost no time in plunging into the repast before them.

"I shall leave you now," said the wizened man. "It is long past midnight. You will find a completely furnished bedroom there."

To the amazement of the boys he pointed toward the door Joe had been on the point of opening a few minutes before.

"Good night, Mr. Adar. Thank you very much for the meal," Frank said.

Nodding, the old man waddled up the creaky staircase. Another burst of thunder rattled the windows. The boys started involuntarily.

"What a night to be in a place like this!" said Joe. "A crazy house, a maniac, and a lightning storm-----"

"Never mind all that. 'We must find out about Beeson. That's what we came for.' Frank reminded his brother.

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" Right. Finished eating ?"

As the Hardys passed into the bedroom the furniture automatically began to glow with a peculiar purplish hue. In a moment the beds, chairs, dresser, and table were perfectly outlined with a thin weird light.

"They look like skeletons," Joe grunted.

"Wonder if they're going to stay on all night. I don't see any switches around."

Frank sat down on one of the twin beds. To their astonishment the eerie glow about them began to subside.

"Can you beat that!" said Joe. "Hop in bed and the lights go off automatically. If they weren't such spooky-looking things in the first place I'd say the idea was great."

Frank glanced at his watch. "Adar must be asleep by now. What do you say we get moving?" he proposed.

"I'm ready."

On tiptoe the boys crossed the room. Joe tugged on the doorknob. With a gasp of alarm he stared at his brother.



" Frank! It won't move!"

A burst of wild laughter sounded above the increasing roar of the storm.

" Ha-ha-ha-ha!" shrieked the hunched-over figure in the room with the mysterious listening-in set. "Now for my *real* secret! My *greatest* secret! Now for the GHOSTS."

The Listening Ear 127

Panting with excitement the old man pressed a lever. There was a whirring sound and a small panel slid open in the wall. Stretching a bony fist into the aperture the strange wizard withdrew a large, iron key.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A DESPERATE FIGHT

clump, clump, clump!

"He's coming downstairs!" whispered Joe.

"We'll be ready for him if he tries any funny business," said Frank with Hardy determination.

The boys stationed themselves on opposite sides of the sealed door. Suddenly the footfalls died away.

"Where did" he go, Frank?"

"How do I know? Sounded, though, as if he went down below us."

"Maybe Beeson is still in the basement. Golly, if only we could get out of this room!"

A faint rattle of heavy chains sounded as a shadowy figure fumbled with the lock of a barred door.

"In a moment ... in a moment ... I shall inspect my ghosts. Ah, the key turns, the bolt clicks," the hushed voice said.

A massive door swung open.

"Aha, look at them! Nicely frozen, all three of them. If their friends knew they were safely stored away here in my laboratory, wouldn't they be surprised!"

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A Desperate Fight 129

Upstairs in their bedroom the boys strained their ears through the gloom.

"Isn't that somebody talking?" asked Frank.

"Hard to tell, it's so muffled. I'll bet my shirt something queer is going on."

"Joe, our door's unlocked!" exclaimed Frank suddenly as he tugged at the knob.

Gingerly he swung open the door.

"We'd better be careful," advised Joe. "Adar probably knows exactly what's happening."

Frank shrugged impatiently. "Come on. Anything's better than sitting around in this weird room," he decided.

The living room was black and silent. The boys moved into the hall.

"Look, Frank. Isn't that a light under that door down there?" asked Joe.

A faint gleam could be seen through the crevice.

"Maybe Adar is in there."

"There's one good way to find out," said Joe.

Impulsively the younger lad crossed the hall and tried the knob. The door opened onto a short flight of steps to the basement. Quietly the boys descended and looked into a room below. The sight that met their eyes staggered them.

"Beeson!" cried Joe.

"And the other three!" exclaimed Frank.

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"Look at them! Coated with frost! Funny, it doesn't feel especially cold in here."

The lad pointed to a large dynamo which was purring quietly. A spotlight on the apparatus was focused directly on four still figures on the floor. It was a weird sight.

"This may be scientific," concluded Joe, "but it's pretty horrible."

"A person becomes frozen when he gets in the way of that light beam, I '11 bet," said Frank. He stretched a finger across the rays. "Look! Coated with ice. Just as I thought."

"Let's turn the thing off," suggested Joe. " There's a switch on the wall. Now!"

As he twisted the device, the whine of the dynamo ceased abruptly.

"It'll probably take those men a couple of days to thaw out," Frank whispered as the brothers watched the motionless forms.

"Unless Adar comes in the meantime to turn on the machine. And he certainly will," said Joe. "Let's get out of here and call the police. It's our duty."

"Good idea if we can *get* out," agreed his brother. "Let's try the front door just for luck."

Quickly the Hardys left the awesome spot and hurried up the stairway. Back on the first floor they listened attentively.

"Not a sound," said Joe.

A Desperate Fight 131

"Adar must be asleep after all," surmised Frank.

"Let's try to get out," urged the younger boy.

To their surprise and delight the big front door opened readily when Joe tried the handle. Hastily the boys slipped out and sloshed through the mud until they reached their car.

"Adar's sure to hear us when we start the engine," said Joe fearfully.

"We can't help that. We can get the police and be back here in thirty minutes," replied Frank.

He stepped on the starter and the engine of the roadster sprang into life. Three seconds later the car skidded back onto the old country road and then sped off toward the city. Joe Hardy heaved a sigh of relief.

" Thank goodness-Oh!"

There was a terrific explosion. The little car swerved with a sickening jolt. Completely out of control it crashed into a tree. Its two passengers

hurtled into the thicket and lay stunned for a minute. Then Frank sat up and scraped a clump of mud from his face.

" Joe! Where are you ?"

"Whowee, what happened?" his brother answered, as he crawled through the underbrush. His head was just beginning to clear. "Are you all right, Frank?" he asked fearfully.

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"I'm not sure yet. Feel as if I'd been sent through a meat grinder."

"That's putting it mildly. What happened, anyhow 1 Did we hit a torpedo ?"

"I think the torpedo was in the engine, Joe," was Frank's wise reply. "If this isn't some of Adar's handiwork I'll eat that rock," he concluded, a tone of disgust in his voice.

"What do you mean? Do you really think that Adar-----7"

"I think he put a time bomb in the engine. What else could have blown us up?" asked Frank.

"Whatever it was, we're lucky we're still alive. Question is, what shall we do next?" queried Joe. " Certainly we can't get to town."

"I've an idea," said Frank. "Let's go back to the house and act as if nothing had happened. It's just possible we can find a phone and use it."

"*Go back?* Why deliberately ask for more trouble from that crazy scientist?" asked Joe in surprise.

"Because that's the last thing he'd ever expect us to do. He'll be so surprised that he might, well, he might change his feelings toward us," was the way Frank figured.

"He might, but I doubt it," Joe said emphatically. "Still, I'll take the chance if you think you're such a good mind reader. Miracles have happened before!"

A Desperate Fight 133

Flinging the mud and debris from their clothes the brothers trekked back to the house. Dawn was just breaking as they reached it.

"The joke will be on us if we can't get in," the younger boy grunted.

"If you call it a joke."

Frank tried the front door. "Hurrah! It's open. Let's go."

A moment later they were back in the bedroom. Not a sound could be heard anywhere.

"Let's clean up and get some sleep," suggested Frank. "If Adar should come in we'll tell him we had a very comfortable night."

The brothers looked at each other and grinned. Soon they had washed, removed their outer clothing, and tumbled into bed. Frank was just dropping off to sleep when there was a sharp rap on the door.

"Come in," Joe called.

"Ah, you are awake. I have some breakfast for you."

The old man entered with a tray heaped with food.

"Let me help you with that, Mr. Adar," Joe offered, jumping up.

"No need to, young man. I press this switch with my foot-" The boys watched in fascination as their queer host trod on a small metal object on the floor. "I press this and you hear a buzz."

"Jumping blazes, Frank, look at the table

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coming out of the floor!" exclaimed Joe, fascinated.

Adar beamed. "You like my inventions, do you not?"

He set down the tray of food on a neat table which had appeared from a small trapdoor near Frank's bed.

"Yes, I have many surprises for use when necessary," the inventor went on.

Joe thought he detected a peculiar look in the old man's eyes as he spoke.

"That is wonderful," the boy murmured.

" I must leave you now," said Adar. " I have certain matters to attend to. But first-goodness, I nearly forgot!-did you pass a pleasant night?"

"We got along very well, thank you," Frank said.

Adar threw the boy a piercing glance.

"I-I notice you have some, uh, some scratches on your cheeks. Both of you have. I hadn't noticed them before."

Frank reddened. Then with an effort he collected himself.

"We went out to learn if our car was all right, Mr. Adar. In the dark we couldn't see some brambles and fell into them."

"Yes, yes, I understand, young men. There are many things hereabouts that are difficult for strangers to see."

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He regarded them silently for a prolonged interval, then shambled from the room without another word.

"Say, I didn't like the way he looked at us that time, Frank, did you?" asked Joe.

"Can't say I did. We'll have to watch our step. He's as crafty as a fox."

Joe swallowed the last of his bacon and eggs. "Well, he hasn't tried to poison us yet, anyhow. The meals he gives us taste wonderful. We'll have to find out how he cooks and tell Mother. It might save her some trouble."

"Speaking of home," said Frank, "I wonder where Dad is. It wouldn't surprise me if he should show up here."

Heavy footsteps suddenly sounded just outside their room. The boys looked at each other questioningly, for this was not Adar's tread. Before either could make a move the door burst open.

"Well, just look who's here," boomed a harsh, unpleasant voice.

"Jest who you were lookin' for, Boss!" said a short, ugly individual who stood beside the first speaker.

At sight of the newcomers both Hardy boys jumped to their feet and watched attentively from the opposite side of the room.

"What do you want, Duke Beeson?" Frank inquired evenly of the pseudo Indian Prince.

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The gang leader took a menacing step forward while his three henchmen crowded alongside their superior, ready for action.

"What do I want? Why, nothin' much," the man purred. "Nothin' but you two smart young men," he hissed at the boys.

" Shall we rush 'em, Boss !" queried the squat man with a leer.

"Stay where you are, Bunt. I'll handle those young whippersnappers. Come here, you two!" Beeson ordered, clipping his words.

"You'll have to come and get us," Joe snorted, putting up a brave front.

"You certainly will," agreed Frank.

At that moment the door flew open and Adar sidled in. The old man showed no surprise whatsoever, but merely walked to one corner of the room and waited. Beeson whirled around with an ugly curl to his lips.

"The same goes for you, Adar," he hissed angrily. "Freeze us up, will you? Come over here!" he barked.

One of the men snickered. "Can't say as the freezing did us much harm, Boss. I feel stronger than an ox!"

Beeson scowled at the fellow.

"All right, then, Pudge," he said, "go over and drag that old man out of his corner. Runt, you and Spike take care of these two young meddlers."

"You mean tackle 'em?" Spike asked.

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"Anything you care to call it. I'm Boss here now. Bring them all out to the living room where there's more space to deal with them."

As he looked at the boys, an evil smile spread over Beeson's thin lips.

The two henchmen approached Frank and Joe, who waited with muscles taut. Suddenly the younger brother hurled himself with full force at Spike. But the ruffian was quick. With a swift uppercut the big fellow warded off the attack and sent Joe spinning. The youth leaped up again just as Frank fended off a terrific jab from the man called Runt.

"Meddle with our work, will you?" snarled the latter. " I '11 teach you!"

The Hardys wondered why these men were trying to knock them out. Was it fear that probably the boys had notified the police of their whereabouts? Before escaping the ruffians wanted to be sure the lads would not follow.

The fellow known as Pudge had not moved. He was eyeing Adar with a strange look of fear in his beady eyes.

"I can't get near 'im, Boss!" he said hoarsely. "There's some sort o' magnetism or somethin' around 'im!"

Beeson snorted. "Since when have you become so superstitious? Go on, get him. And hurry up. I have other things to do besides waiting for you," he added angrily.

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Adar cackled gleefully. "You'll find out whom you're trifling with, you will. Ha-ha-ha! You'll find out that Eben Adar is a genius. Yes, sir, a genius!" The old man's whiskers waggled animatedly.

Pudge was scowling. "Honest, Boss, I can't touch the old duffer. Soon's I reach out to grab 'im my hand stops. It won't go no further. I ain't foolin'. I've tried it. I-----"

The rest of his words were drowned out in the increasing noise of the scuffle at the other end of the room, where Frank and Joe were fighting a losing battle against Beeson's powerfully built henchmen. Spike sat

squarely on top of the older boy and was raining blows into the lad's face. Runt had his hands around Joe's neck. The boy was turning purple.

Suddenly Adar hopped across the room, dug a bony fist into Runt's eye, and raced back to his corner before the slow-thinking Pudge could touch him. With a howl of pain Joe's assailant loosened his hold on the boy.

"There!" gasped the youth as he leaped forward in a flash and delivered a smashing blow to Runt's protruding chin.

With a roar of rage the horrid-looking fellow went down but seized Joe's ankle in a grip like a steel trap. The lad was brought to the floor. Again the man's fingers closed around the boy's throat.

## CHAPTEE XVII

### THE SECRET PANEL

Frank gave a sudden heave. Spike, caught unawares, was rolled to one side. Before the bank robber could right himself the boy flung his fist at the man. With a groan the big fellow doubled up.

In a flash Frank reached his brother's side. He clutched Eunt by the shoulders and wrenched him sideways with a terrific twist. This maneuver he followed with a lightning jab to the rogue's chin.

"Hey, there!" cried Beeson, who had been absorbed in watching the futile attempts of Pudge to grab the old inventor. "What's going on?"

Realizing what had happened to his men, he lunged across the room toward Frank, but not before the youth had dragged his brothers within a few feet of Adar's corner. Having heard Pudge's remarks, he realized there might be protection near the old man.

"So that's your game!" Beeson screamed.

The man whipped about and dived toward the boys. Suddenly he stopped short. He was unable to get any closer.

"That's all right, young men," Adar croaked unconcernedly, "he can't touch you. Thanks to my genius I have extended the bipolar field of magnetism a few more feet. You are safe," he said with a smile.

Joe's face gradually assumed a normal color as the circulation was restored to it.

"Thanks," he panted at his brother. "I thought I was done for that time. And thank you, Mr. Adar."

Beeson and his men were glaring at the boys and the old man like a row of tigers.

"Don't get excited, folks," the inventor babbled at them all. "And don't try to touch us, for you can't do it," he boasted.

The gangster chief was so angry at his helplessness he could hardly speak.

"You-you swine!" he spluttered at them. "Just wait! Your lives won't be worth one of your whiskers, Adar! You-----"

"Don't waste your breath, Beeson," Frank suddenly called out. "You'll be in jail where you belong before you can carry out any of your threats "

"Jail!" Joe snorted. "He'll be walking to the electric chair, you mean. How many bank cashiers have you killed so far, Beeson! I've lost count."

The gangster winced. "What are you talking about?" he said, glowering at them. "Yon must have me mixed up with, somebody else."

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Prank laughed aloud. "I don't believe the police will think so." The lad's face assumed a grim expression. "Didn't you rob the Wind-ham bank, Duke Beeson? And kill a few people in the bargain, Chief Shining Light? Didn't you rob the Erie bank and several other institutions, Big Boss?"

"Don't you run around in an Indian Prince's costume?" Joe chimed in. "And run some sort of a camp where you can hide between trips and make believe you're just an innocent Sun Worshipper along with those innocent followers you have foiled?"

The gangster, who at first had squirmed under the barrage of questions, now eyed the boys coldly. He had been in tight spots before.

"Prove it," he snapped.

"Prove it yourself," Adar suddenly broke in. "Beeson, you answer every one of those questions. Even if you don't want to, I can make you." The old man gave vent to a burst of unearthly laughter. "Eben Adar can make anybody do anything he wants to."

Beeson's three companions shrank back in sudden fear. They could handle the boys, but this crazy inventor was a different proposition.

"You better tell 'em, Boss," whimpered Bunt. "He's a wizard. He's likely to kill every one of us. I don't want to die!" he whined.

Spike looked at the old man pleadingly.

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"Don't do nothin' to us, please, Mr. Adar. Oh, please. Everything the boys have said is the truth. We-----"

Beeson whirled on his henchman with a snarl. "Shut up, you fool!" he commanded.

"You'll answer those questions in thirty seconds by my special watch here," Adar cackled, drawing a huge timepiece from his pocket, "or else I'll make you tell more than you ever intended to. Hurry up. The seconds are ticking by. One, two, three-----"

Beeson's cruel lips snaked themselves into a diabolical leer.

"I'll tell nothing, and what isn't known can't be proved," he said evenly. "That is my final answer."

Adar was fumbling in his pocket again. Suddenly he withdrew a small instrument that resembled a miniature flashlight. For a few seconds he seemed to be testing it. Then he smiled in seeming satisfaction.

"Very well, you have had your chance," he announced in a shrill voice.

As the boys watched, the inventor pointed a beam of light at the ceiling. There was a loud whirring sound, then a large trapdoor slid back noiselessly directly above their heads.

Beeson's face blanched as a queer-looking machine appeared. It consisted mainly of a row of spinning steel blades on a long metal bar. In the center of it was a light and a gadget

The Secret Panel 143

which looked very much like an old-fashioned camera with a hood over the center section.

"Look out, Chief!": Spike yelled. "*It's* coming at you! Maybe it'll kill you."

The other henchmen joined in screams of terror as Beeson appeared to be drawn toward the device by an irresistible force.

"Let me go-let me go!" howled the man, his eyes rolling wildly.

He struggled desperately, but try as he might, he could not walk away from a spot directly beneath the descending machine.

"You have had your chance," intoned Adar. "In a few seconds you will tell all. Then, if I choose to give your record to the police, I shall do so. If I decide to deal with you myself, then I shall exercise further powers over you," he promised.

As he finished speaking, he threw back his shaggy head and burst into laughter. Frank and Joe stood transfixed. Suddenly the older lad clutched at the scientist's sleeve.

"He should be allowed a fair trial, Mr. Adar!" said the boy, a sense of justice sweeping over him.

"A trial? I gave him his trial, young man. He had his chance. And now in just a few moments my own special invention will make him tell the truth, and then-----"

The machine came closer. Duke Beeson, rooted to the spot, was all but unconscious from

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terror. His tongue hung below his lips and great drops of perspiration poured from his forehead. His face was livid and the muscles in it writhed grotesquely. He tried to speak but no sound would come from his throat.

" Ha! Ha!" cackled his tormentor.

"Look here, Mr. Adar, you have no right to take the law in your own hands," said Joe Hardy suddenly.

Adar's laughter died away. The wrinkled face, half hidden in whiskers, gradually distorted itself into a terrifying mask of hate. The eyes narrowed to slits as he gazed at the boy.

"You too," he said. "I defend you and you turn on me. You will be treated the same as this man," chanted his high-pitched voice.

There was a click, and the whirring sound of the machine overhead died away. In the deadly silence that followed the inventor melted from sight through the wall behind him. A panel had slid noiselessly open and then as silently closed again.

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" My boys! My boys!" sobbed a voice in the thick woods outside, around a bend in the rutted country lane.

A figure in wrinkled clothing stood with bowed head before the ruins of the Hardy brothers' automobile. Long and sorrowfully the man stared at the wreckage as a slight

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breeze stirred in the trees towering overhead.

"Gone . . . forever." The drawn lips formed the words soundlessly.

At length the figure turned and wet-eyed trudged away.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### TRAPPED!

Beeson looked at the blanched faces of his three henchmen.

"Well, what are you standing there for? Why don't you do something?" he barked.

Striding to the door, he wrenched the knob. The door did not budge. With a grimace he turned toward the others.

Runt looked at his superior. "There ain't a thing to do, boss, far as I can see. We're prisoners!"

"Why isn't there? Find that secret panel the old man went through. Get busy!"

Joe, who had been strolling casually about the room for the past few moments, stepped alongside his brother and whispered into the latter's ear. Frank's face became tense and he nodded.

"Secrets, eh?" sneered Runt. "Hey, Boss, they're tellin' secrets. Maybe we ought to find out what their secrets are."

"Yes, maybe we ought to," Spike chimed in excitedly.

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The two ruffians circled the boys like tigers about to pounce on their prey.

"You found that secret door yet, boys!" Beeson hissed sarcastically.

The Hardys did not speak.

"Not yet, Boss, but we're lookin'," returned one henchman guiltily.

Still throwing menacing glances at the boys, Spike and Runt sidled against the wall and began to tap on it.

"Sounds hollow there, don't it, Runt?"

The hatchet-faced individual tapped again and listened intently.

"No, that ain't hollow," scoffed his companion. "You're losing your technique for such things." He tried to laugh.

"There's nothing funny," said Beeson. "Be quiet."

"I've been all over that wall," called Pudge from the opposite side of the room. "Ain't any trapdoors there."

"What you want to bet there's a secret panel right here?" Spike demanded, paying no attention to his chief's command to be quiet.

He pushed at the wall. Nothing happened, and his two colleagues burst into harsh laughter.

"Well, that don't prove a single thing," Spike grimaced. "Maybe it's a secret door and it's locked."

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Joe was watching the men with bated breath. "They're getting too close for comfort, Frank," he whispered.

"Where did you say you found the panel! There?" his brother pointed, concealing his hand.

"Yes! It's only about four inches from where Spike is tapping. You can't see the seam from here but there's a door, no doubt about it. I could feel it."

"Maybe we ought to shove it open quick and get out of here before they have time to follow," suggested Frank.

"There hasn't been any chance yet," said Joe. "One or another of them has been standing almost alongside the place ever since I found it. Gee, I wish they'd get away."

Spike hawked his throat and stood back from the wall.

"Listen, you guys," he said.

Eunt and Pudge ceased their tapping and stared at the speaker.



"What's the use of lookin' for secret doors where the daffy old man *didn't* go through? What are you lookin' way over there for, Pudge?" he asked.

The squat man blinked stupidly.

"You can't never tell about crazy science folks, Spike. The old man may have gone out the wall over where you are but that don't say there ain't another secret door over here."

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"I don't notice as how you're findin' the door very fast where *you* are, Spike," Bunt chimed in accusingly.

The thin man snorted. "You talk like school kids. Didn't that old man go out the wall somewhere aroun' where I'm standin'? All rightf then, ain't it sensible to hunt around before you go lookin' around somewheres else?" he asked.

"Well, maybe Spike is right," Bunt said. "He ain't finished lookin' around his wall yet. Suppose we go help 'im, Pudge."

Joe's heart skipped a beat as the two sidled alongside the other henchman and began to tap directly over the panel the younger Hardy lad had discovered a few minutes before.

"Say, here's a real hollow place here," Bunt exclaimed. "Come over and---"

Just then a familiar whirr started up.

"The machine! It's that crazy machine again!" Spike yelled, shying away from the spot. "The old fellow said it would make you tell the truth and then-----"

"I'll smash it!" said Beeson.

"What'11 you use?" asked Bunt sarcastically.

"How about your sweater? Maybe I can clog one of those wheels with it," suggested the head gangster excitedly.

During the past few seconds the Hardys had been whispering and now decided to interfere with the man's plans. If there was any chance that Adar could accomplish what he had said,

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then the old man's scheme should be carried out. A recorded confession from this bank robber would be invaluable.

"What about the later developments Adar promised?" Frank said cautiously.

"Dad gave us a job to do," Joe replied. "We must get the truth from the criminals as well as the men themselves."

Runt had removed his sweater, which Beeson now was in the act of rolling into a ball. In a moment he would throw it at the whirring blades and ruin the machine.

"Stop that!" yelled Joe, flinging himself upon the leader of the ruffians.

Just as the boy got the man to the floor a strange thing happened. Joe felt Beeson being pulled away from him.

"Look out for the magnetic spot, Joe!" Frank yelled.

Irresistibly Duke Beeson's whole body was drawn beneath the light. Slowly, and against his will, it straightened to an upright position. Presently the man began to speak as if in a trance.

"The first thing I ever stole in my life was my teacher's pocketbook," he said in a drawl. "She let me go, 'cause I promised I'd never steal anything again. But I did. I took some money from behind the counter in Mr. Blake's store. That was so easy I went to another place."

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The Hardys were thrilled.

"It works!" whispered Joe to his brother. "Adar's machine works!"

Across the room the confessor's three henchmen stood terror-stricken. Not one seemed able to move. They knew that soon their own names would

be mentioned in connection with the recent crimes committed.

"I picked up a buddy and we decided to try a big job," the voice under the machine went on in a droning tone.

Spike winced as his first offense with Beeson was detailed in full by his chief.

"Frank," whispered Joe, "let's get out of here while we have a chance."

"What do you mean?" asked his brother.

"The secret panel," was the reply. "I'm sure we can make it without the others noticing us. Follow me."

Little by little the boys inched their way along the wall. Presently Joe gave a signal. By this time Beeson had droned through his recital and was up to his most recent affair which was the one at the Erie bank.

"Now!" said Joe tensely.

Silently, with his hands behind him, the boy began to push against a ridge in the paneling. It yielded!

"Quick!" said Frank.

At the same moment the machine above Beeson stopped whirring. The attention of the

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four criminals was directed to the slight sound made by the moving wall. There was just enough space for the boys to squeeze through! Could they make it? "After 'em!" shouted Spike.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CLUE IN THE MESSAGE

"after 'em!" came a chorus of shouts from behind the wall, as the boys slid to the room beyond. There was a sudden rush of feet toward them as they stood up.

"Quick, we must slam the door shut!" Frank panted.

"Eight!" said Joe.

The Hardys hurled themselves with full force against the secret panel and closed it just in time. At once a thunder of fists sounded from the opposite side.

"Open that door!" roared a voice which the boys recognized as that of the henchman called Spike.

The pounding doubled in intensity. Suddenly the door yielded a few inches.

"Frank, that switch! Maybe it locks the secret panel," Joe gasped.

The two boys were bracing themselves desperately against the furious onslaughts of the imprisoned ruffians.

"I'll see if I can reach it," the older lad replied, straining every muscle.

A small knob attached to two wires that dis^

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appeared into the wall was situated a few inches from where Frank's hands were braced.

"Worth a try," said Joe. "Hope it doesn't open it or start up another machine."

Frank gave the knob a quick twist. Instantly the door, which their prisoners had managed to push open a few inches, slammed shut. The pressure against the boys' hands and feet ceased abruptly though the pounding continued.

"That did it, all right," Frank exclaimed. "Boy, that was lucky for us. Another ten seconds and those fellows would have had us. Between them and Adar, life isn't worth much around here."

The terrific commotion behind the door continued. The boys even thought it possible the big men might smash through to the room where they were standing.

"In their present frame of mind I'd just as soon those men stay put," Joe observed dryly. Then he shuddered. "Golly, Frank, what are we going to do now? Where do you suppose Adar is?"

The room they found themselves in was gloomy and forbidding. The single door at the far end was shut.

"If it's not one door it's another," Frank muttered, crossing the floor.

He walked over to the door and wrenched the handle impatiently. It refused to budge.

The Clue in the Message 155

"Frank! Isn't that a telephone on that table?" Joe asked excitedly.

Now that their eyes were accustomed to the semi-darkness the Hardys could see several chairs scattered about. A table stood in one corner, the instrument on it.

"Do you suppose it's really a phone, Joe! Around this place one cannot tell what anything is," Frank remarked wisely.

They looked at the gadget carefully, but did not touch it.

"Looks like a regular phone to me," Joe said after a moment, seeing a directory lying near

by.

"Wait a minute, Joe. What about those switches up there?"

Frank pointed to a bank of electric buttons on the wall.

"We'd better leave 'em alone, if you ask me," replied his brother. "I'm sure they have nothing to do with the phone."

"All right. Try the line."

Joe took the receiver from the cradle. A small light suddenly flashed on the switchboard.

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"Don't know. Hear anything in the receiver?" Frank inquired.

"Not a sound."

"Wait. I '11 pull the switch by the light," the older lad said excitedly.

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There was a click and the light flashed off. Joe's tense face broke into a grin.

"Whatever you did, Frank, it was right. The operator is asking for the number!"

"I' Good. See if you can call home."

"Maybe we ought to get the police instead," said Joe.

The older lad shook his head.

"Better not," he whispered. "I've an idea Adar may be listening in somewhere. That's probably what those switches are for."

Joe hung up the receiver. "You're right, Frank. Golly, I hadn't thought of that."

"I 've an idea," said his brother. "If Adar's listening in we'd better try a little strategy. Let's put in a call to Aunt Gertrude. We'll ask her to come here for a visit to her old friend. I'11 bet she'd do it, too."

"Swell!" Joe burst out under his breath. "If the old man hears that it may calm him down completely. Maybe he'd really like to see Aunt Gertrude!"

"She might be able to put his mind back on the track again. I've heard of things like that happening," said Frank enthusiastically.

Eagerly Joe picked up the phone again.

"Hello, operator? I'd like to speak to Miss Gertrude Hardy, Bayport 6132."

The hearts of the boys pounded as they listened to the crackle in the receiver.

"Golly, I hope Adar doesn't come in now

The Clue in the Message 157

and spoil everything," Joe said excitedly under his breath. "He'd probably-hello? Hello, Aunt Gertrude?"

The younger Hardy lad suppressed a whoop of joy, while Frank turned a handspring alongside the phone. His brother motioned for silence.

"Aunt Gertrude?" Joe continued. "Yes, we're all right. We're-we're visiting Mr. Adar, and we think he-he'd like to see you. He'd like to see you very much."

The instrument crackled loudly.

"No, he didn't say he wanted to," Joe went on, "but we're sure he would, Aunt Gertrude. He's a-a great inventor. That's why we want you to come. We think if you talk to him he 'll -he 'll tell you everything. What's that? Just a minute."

Joe pressed his hand over the mouthpiece and turned to Frank.

"She doesn't know how to get here. I'd forgotten about that."

"Chet knows. Did Chet get back home! Ask her," replied Frank eagerly.

Joe spoke into the phone for a moment then turned again to his brother.

"Chet's there. He came to the phone himself. I made him promise he'd get here with Aunt Gertrude as soon as they can make it."

"That's great!"

"And Frank, Dad's there too! He's coming

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with them. Says lie understands. He said, too, he's thankful beyond words. What can he mean?"

The boys could not guess the agony their father had been through since seeing the wrecked roadster, so they were very much puzzled by his remark.

"Better hang up," advised Frank to his brother. "I think I heard footsteps."

Hurriedly Joe clicked the receiver back on the hook and listened. He looked around him questioningly.

"I don't hear anything. Say, I don't even hear Beeson and his gang. What do you suppose happened to them?" he asked, worried.

The boys glanced anxiously toward the secret door through which they had come.

"Maybe they're frozen again," said Joe in awe.

He shivered, for a deathly stillness had settled over the adjacent room. Frank held up a warning finger. Before he could utter a word a door at the far end of the room slowly opened.

At first no one could be seen. Then the hunched, ghostly figure of Adar shuffled in. Both boys leaped to their feet. To their surprise the wizard was smiling.

"Well, upon my word," he croaked, not unpleasantly, "I have been neglecting you young men."

The Clue in the Message 159

Frank and Joe looked at each other, then regarded their host suspiciously.

"As a matter of fact," the old man went on, "I haven't been neglecting you altogether. No, not altogether."

As his eyes narrowed slightly, the boys waited with racing pulses for what might come.



"I, ahem, I understand we are to be favored with visitors."

Frank had a sudden hunch.

"Yes, sir," he said, "we took the liberty of using your phone, Mr. Adar, and asking our Aunt-----"

"Your Aunt Gertrude," finished the eccentric genius with a triumphant look. "And a person named Chet. Yes, boys, thanks to my inventive genius I am able to listen to conversations, whether by telephone or otherwise, all over my house."

"That is wonderful," murmured Joe.

There was an interval of silence during which the man regarded the boys intently. Then he smiled again.

"Do you know, I rather like you two young men," he said.

"We like you, Mr. Adar, and we certainly admire your inventions," Frank remarked sin-cerely.

The wizard beamed.

"I am glad you do. My inventions, you know,

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are my life. They are my reason for existing. I hope to offer them as a contribution to science when they shall be perfected," he said proudly.

"When they are perfected!" Joe gasped. "Golly, Mr. Adar, I don't see how you could improve upon them."

The man waved a bony hand. "Nothing exists that cannot be improved upon, young man. Remember that. It will be a good lesson. But you must be hungry. I shall get us a bite."

He disappeared through the doorway.

"Can you beat that?" Joe exclaimed. "There's no telling what he'll do or how he'll act next. I suspect he's really very kind-hearted."

"Apparently he has forgotten about Beeson and the other men. Or has he ? "

"I shouldn't be too sure. Still, he seems to have two personalities, doesn't he?"

"Just like Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. I shouldn't be surprised if he forgets everything he did in one personality when he's in the other," remarked Frank wisely.

"Trouble is one can never tell when he's going to change."

The boys talked for a while, then sat thinking for a time.

"Here he comes," said Joe finally.

Adar entered empty-handed.

"Don't worry, boys, I haven't forgotten our little lunch. But in this particular room the

The Clue in the Message 161

table, tray and food all come up through the floor. Now watch closely."

He stepped on a hidden switch. Immediately there was a buzzing sound. A trapdoor in the floor opened, and a small table loaded with tempting victuals rose up.

The boys acclaimed the feat and readily plunged into the miniature banquet. Adar watched them with a pleased expression on his bearded face.

"Do you know, *I* shall be glad to see your Aunt Gertrude again, boys. I remember her well. We went to school together. Those were happy days."

He chuckled aloud and his eyes took on a reminiscent look.

"I fear she thought me rather peculiar," he went on. "My inventions, you know. *I* was working on them even then. I started young."

Frank swallowed the last of a slice of delicious broiled chicken.

"Best meal I ever tasted, Mr. Adar," he complimented his host. "Golly, Joe, wouldn't Chet love to be here just about now? He likes nothing better

than to eat," Frank ejaculated.

Adar rose to his feet. "I must leave you for a while, boys. I have work to do. Make yourselves comfortable."

The brothers waited until his footsteps had died away before speaking.

"Maybe we'd better slip some of this food to

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Beeson and his men," Joe whispered, a wave of pity for the imprisoned men sweeping over him. "They'll starve to death otherwise, likely as not."

"Good Samaritan, aren't you?" Frank chuckled. "All right, let's do it. But we'll have to act quickly. Adar may come back any time and then there would be trouble."

Hastily the boys placed some untouched food from the bountiful meal onto a plate. Frank crept over to the secret door.

"I'll run the switch," said Joe, grasping the lever. "Better shove the stuff inside in a hurry before those fellows get out."

"Listen! Adar's coming back! Quick! Turn the switch!"

Frank swung the secret door open just far enough to slip the plate of food inside. With a snap he shut the panel and Joe twisted the controlling switch again. The deed was accomplished none too soon, for Adar was about to enter.

"A car has just driven up, young men," he was saying. "Your Aunt Gertrude, I presume, and your friend Chet."

Frank thought the old man looked at them suspiciously. A moment later, as a knock resounded on the front door, the wizard signaled.

"Come. We shall admit them."

"Golly, I hope Aunt Gertrude plays the game right," Joe whispered in his brother's ear as

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they followed Adar into the hall. "Hope she doesn't say anything to upset the old codger."

Their doubts were soon forgotten, so delighted were they to see their aunt, Chet and their father. When introductions were completed Adar ushered them along the hall and into the room where the boys had just eaten.

"You men make yourselves at home here," he babbled happily. "Come, Gertrude, I must show you my electrically fed gardenias."

The woman seemed to be frightened, but went off with the old man. Frank whispered a hurried account of their situation to his detective father.

"The secret door is right over there, Dad. Now that you 're here maybe we can capture the bank robbers."

Fenton Hardy nodded. "Frank, Joe and Chet, stand directly behind me. I'll open the door. Where's the switch-oh, yes."

With pounding hearts the boys watched as the knob was turned. There was a click.

"Beady, everybody?"

"Yes, Dad," Frank replied tensely.

The detective swung his foot against the door. With a loud squeak it slid open.

The room was empty!

## CHAPTER XX

### WATCHED!

at first the boys stared incredulously. Then as the truth swept over them Frank flopped into a chair with a groan.

"They *couldn't* have escaped, Dad! They *couldn't* have."

Fenton Hardy smiled tolerantly and patted his son's shoulder.

"When you've been a detective as long as I have-----"

" I know, Dad. But-" He gazed around the room bitterly. Suddenly his face brightened. "I'll bet they're still in the house! This is an inside room; there aren't any windows."

His father nodded.

"That sounds plausible. And there's another possibility. I've had a squad of men in the woods around this house for the past two hours."

"Maybe they've been captured!" Joe burst out. "Golly, Dad, let's go out and see."

Mr. Hardy held up a cautioning hand. "Just a minute, son. A good detective doesn't let his impulses get the better of him."

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The lad smiled sheepishly. "I'm sorryj Dad," he said. "You have taught me that."

"I think the first thing to do, boys," Mr. Hardy went on, "is to see how our friend Adar is getting along with Aunt Gertrude; or the other way around."

" That's right," Frank interjected. " It 'd b« just as well not to let him get suspicious of anything."

Chet waddled toward the door, and the group went into the hall.

"I think I'll wait outside in the car. I had more than enough of this place last time I was here," said the fat boy.

Gazing about him with a shudder he hurriedly left the house.

"Now," said Fenton Hardy to his sons, "where might Adar be?"

Frank led them around a corner.

"This is where he showed us his flowers, I think," the lad said.

"That *was* the room, all right," Joe agreed. "But that doesn't mean it is now. Things change around here in the flash of an eyelid."

When Frank opened the door they found themselves in a large, spotless kitchen.

"What did I tell you!" Joe grunted. "Did you ever see such a place, Dad?"

Fenton Hardy turned his head. "I thought I heard voices somewhere."

Frank pricked up his ears and sidled into the

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hall. "I hear them too, Dad. They're coming from that room over there."

The boys and their father walked toward another door through which the muffled tones of someone speaking could be heard.

"-and this species here, Gertrude, this is a rare variety of the Ch'linglien, a Chinese flower of exquisite beauty. Ah, but the Orientals have never seen *this*."

"Gracious, it is huge, Eben," broke in another voice, higher pitched than that of the first speaker.

"And the fragrance, Gertrude! Only my electrified atmosphere could produce such a-->>

Fenton Hardy signaled to his sons and the three entered. The room was not the same flowering spot the boys had been in before.

"Excuse us for interrupting, Mr. Adar," smiled the detective. " We came to see how you two are getting along."

"Oh, very well indeed," said the wizard absently. He turned back to his flowers. "As I was saying, Gertrude-----"

Mr. Hardy winked at Frank and Joe. The brothers tiptoed out behind their father.

"You boys stay right here and keep Adar occupied. I'm going outside."

"To check up on your men?" Frank queried tensely.

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Mr. Hardy nodded. "If by some chance they've caught Beeson I'll call you."

Noiselessly he slipped out the front door, while the boys re-entered the room where Adar now was peering at a plant through a large magnifying glass.

"Now, *this* species-" He paused and looked at the brothers with a grimace. " Please, I do not wish to be disturbed when I am discussing my flowers. As I was saying, Gertrude-----"

Frank went to a window and silently beckoned to Joe to follow him.

"There goes Dad," he whispered. "Let's watch what happens."

The stalwart figure of their handsome father could be seen weaving in and out among the tall trees which surrounded the house. Suddenly another form appeared. The two held a conference and seemed to exchange papers. At length the detective turned back toward the house.

"Good. He's coming back," said Joe.

"And is this plant grown by electricity too, Eben?" Aunt Gertrude was inquiring. She seemed to have got over her nervousness entirely.

The old man straightened up and frowaed.

"Certainly it is. Why shouldn't it be? Why don't you pay attention to what I have been-

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so! You young men are here spying on me again."

A wild light crept into the man's eyes, just as Mr. Hardy rapped on the door and entered.

"You too!" shouted the scientist, pointing a finger at the detective. "You are spying too! Get out! Get out, all of you! I won't have you here. You interrupt my work. You-you-----"

He shambled to the door and flung it open. As the visitors passed into the hall the eccentric inventor hopped ahead of them and opened the great front door.

"Out of here-every one of you!" he shouted, a wild look in his eyes.

Joe caught his aunt's sleeve. "Talk to him, Aunt Gertrude! See if you can quiet him down. Quick!" he whispered. "This is our only chance!"

The old lady nodded.

"Eben. Eben Adar! What makes you so impolite all of a sudd-----"

"Who asked you to talk, you antiquated witch?" screamed the scientist, now at the height of one of his spells. "I think you are a ghost. I think you're *all* ghosts!"

He burst into a round of fiendish laughter and rubbed his palms together.

"Heh, heh, heh! Ghosts. Well, I have a place for ghosts. You'd better leave now before I count ten. Ha-ha-ha! Look at you! Just ready for my ice machine."

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Frank turned to his father. "Shall we hold him and send for the police?"

The detective shook his head. "Leave him alone," he whispered. "I have a plan which I think will work."



The wizard gave Joe, who was behind the others, a powerful shove and slammed the door. They could hear another outburst of wild laughter echoing through the gloomy, strange old house.

Mr. Hardy turned to the others. "The first thing we'll do-----"

"The first thing you'll do, Fenton Hardy, is to see that I am taken home at once!" Aunt Gertrude shouted at him. "Never in my born days have I been subjected to such-such humiliation. Not to mention the extreme danger! Why-why-!" she spluttered.

Her brother smiled tolerantly. "Chet will take you home, Gertrude. Here he is now."

"And stuffing himself as usual," Joe burst out, laughing in spite of the gravity of the situation.

He pointed to their stout chum, who was seated on the running board of the car, contentedly munching a huge sandwich.

"It's about time you folks came back," he drawled. "I thought, well, I, uh, I-----"

"You thought Dad and Aunt Gertrude weren't coming so you ate all the lunch," Frank finished with a chuckle.

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"Well, let's get started," Mr. Hardy said when the general laughter had subsided. "Chet, I want you to drive us all to Erie right away. I have a plan I want to put into action."

"All right, Mr. Hardy. Only, are we-do we have to come back to this place again?" He looked pleadingly at the detective.

"You won't have to, Chet, my boy," the detective chuckled. "My sons and I will leave you in Erie. You'll drive Miss Hardy home from there. So there's nothing to worry about."

Chet heaved a sigh of relief while the brothers wondered what their father had in mind for them to do. They could find out nothing, for he evaded their questions. No doubt he did not wish his sister and Chet to

know his schemes. Not until they had bidden the others good-bye at an Erie hotel, did he speak of the matter.

"My plan is this," Mr. Hardy began as he and his sons took seats in a corner of the lobby. "I think you'll be able to get back in the good graces of Adar if you take him a present of some sort. A book, perhaps."

' \* A book on electricity, "Joe exclaimed. " He ought to like that."

Frank nodded. "He showed us his library, Dad-he seemed to be very proud of it. I think that would be a great idea."

"Very well, then, that's settled," Mr. Hardy went on. "I'll leave the details of the gift to you boys. Pick something good."

Watched!

"What shall we do after that, Dad I" Joe looked at his father wonderingly.

"Leave that to me," the detective smiled. "Plenty of help will be on hand once you've found a way to get inside the house again. Listen."

He drew his chair closer and spoke seriously in low tones for several moments. Then he handed them several five dollar bills.

"All right, Dad," said Frank at length. "We'll make it as soon as we can. May take us a day or so to find a book which the queer man might like."

Fenton Hardy arose and waved his hand. A moment later he had disappeared through the lobby door to the street. The brothers immediately held a consultation.

"If we're going to buy Mr. Adar a book it'll have to be a good one, Frank," said Joe. " He knows just about all there is to know about electricity and I doubt that he's interested in anything else."

"You're right. We'll never find one here in Erie. How about Columbia! That's a good-sized city. Let's take a plane."

Going to the hotel desk, Frank inquired about connections. In a moment he was back at his brother's side.

"I made reservations on the first plane tomorrow morning, Joe. We can be back by eve--ning."

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The Hardy boys found it difficult to sleep that night, so excited were they over the prospects ahead. They were downstairs for an early breakfast. Shortly afterward they took a taxi to the airport located on the outskirts of the town.

"Whew, that's a beauty, Frank!" Joe squealed as they approached a giant airliner whose propellers flashed in the early morning sun.

"Guess we'd better hurry," said Frank.

"Right this way," said a porter as they jumped from the cab. "Ship for Columbia is ready to leave."

In a few moments the boys were aboard and sank back into the luxurious cushions. As they watched the ground recede below, Frank noticed a large estate.

"Look, Joe, isn't that Adar's house?" he suddenly exclaimed, pointing out the wide window.

"Say, I'll bet it is! Look at the size of it. Rambles all over. Golly, those woods go on forever, don't they?"

"I '11 say! Not another house or farm or anything near by. Wonder what the old man's doing," Frank observed.

"Probably pulling some switches or other gadgets. What I'd like to know is, where is Beeson? In the house or out?"

"Your guess is as good as mine."

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The great ship rumbled majestically onward Two hours later it glided to a perfect landing at Columbia's busy airport. Taking a taxi, the Hardys soon arrived in the shopping center of the city. Alighting, they walked along one of the main streets.

"There's a bookstore, Frank. Looks like a big one. Let's go in," suggested Joe.

Before long they were all but buried under mountains of rare books on electricity brought to them by the genial proprietor.

"Here's one, Joe," the older Hardy lad announced at length. "*The Electricity of the Future*, it is called. Full of gadgets that look something like Adar 's."

The boys paid for the volume and excitedly headed back to the airport.

"We're about half an hour early for the next plane," Joe said, glancing at his watch as they left the cab. "Let's walk around a bit."

"Think I'll have a look at the book while we're waiting," Frank decided. "I've had enough walking."

"All right. I'll meet you here in twenty minutes. Think I'll look around at the planes in the meantime."

After crossing the waiting room, Joe went out the main door leading to the field. He wandered around for a while, then started back. As he neared one side of the building where he had left his brother, a hand was suddenly clamped

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down over his shoulder. A wolfish-looking face leered at him wickedly.

"Weeping Sam!" the boy gasped.

"Yes, Weeping Sam," replied the man. "And is this a lucky break for me," he added with a cruel smile. "I've got you all to myself, and am I going to take advantage of that! I'll say I am," he promised with a meaning look.

# CHAPTER XXI

## THE DEADLY SWITCHBOARD

"Sort o' surprised, ain't you?" Beeson's chief lieutenant sneered triumphantly.

In a flash Joe had collected himself from the surprise.

"What do you want!" he asked. "I'm in a hurry."

"Not so fast! Not so fast!"

Weeping Sam dragged the boy off to a spot where they could not be heard or seen by anyone coming from the building.

"Listen, you young upstart," he rasped, "you'd better tell me where Duke Beeson is or something pretty bad is likely to happen to you and your brother too."

Joe flung the man off.

"I don't know where your pal is," he said firmly. "In fact, I wish I did.»'

The ruffian clenched his fists and inched toward the youth.

"Don't tell *me* you don't know where he is. I know better. Are you goin' to spill it or ain't you?"

The man thrust his unshaven chin into Joe's

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face. For an instant the boy held himself in check. Knowing the man was about to strike him, he swung his fist like lightning.

"Ow!" yelled the gangster, reeling backward.

Before the man could pick himself up Joe had disappeared into the waiting room.

"Frank!"

"What's the trouble? Golly, you're white as a sheet!"

"Weeping Sam's here!"

Hastily Joe told his brother what had happened outside.

"Do you suppose he's going to follow us on the plane?" Frank speculated.

As he glanced at his watch the roar of heavy motors sounded on the field.

"Say, it's time to leave," said Joe.

Outside there was no sign of the gangster. The boys were thankful.

"Guess he must have left," said Frank. "Let's hope so."

Their hearts sank when they entered the cabin of the plane. Weeping Sam already was seated. A cruel smile slithered over his ugly face as he watched them take seats.

"We'll have to give him the slip when we land," Joe whispered, "but the question is, how are we going to do it?"

"That will have to be figured out later," concluded Frank. "If we can get hold of a taxi before he does we ought to be able to get away."

The Deadly Switchboard 177

As the plane thundered on the boys finally forgot the menacing figure in the seat behind them. They became absorbed in the grandeur -of the landscape eight thousand feet below.

"This is the life," said Joe enthusiastically.

At length the hum of the engines gave way to a swish. The big airliner glided into the Erie airport.

"Taxi!" queried a driver as the Hardys hopped from the cabin.

The boys tumbled into the waiting cab and slammed the door.

"Center of town, and make it snappy," Frank ordered.

The car whipped around and sped off. Apprehensively Joe glanced behind.

"Look!"

A second cab was speeding after them. They could see a lone figure in the rear seat. No doubt but that the person was Weeping Sam!

"Confound it!" Frank muttered. "Hurry up, driver, we 're trying to shake off that fellow behind you."

"All right," said the man at the wheel, glancing into his rear-vision mirror. "Shall I heatf for any place special?"

"Drive wherever you want to," Frank rapped out, "so long as you get rid of him."

Their cab sputtered ahead and wheeled around a corner with tires shrieking. They lurched crazily from one side of the bumpy road to the other.

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"This is a dangerous thing to do," said Frank.

"He's still in sight," Joe called. "Golly, look at him ride!"

"He'll go in a ditch before long," said their driver. "Mike, the fellow drivin', he don't know these roads around these parts like I do. I've lived here all my life."

After bouncing wildly over a series of rough spots, the man suddenly cut onto a main highway. He put on more power.

"We'll lose 'em now, boys. He ain't got the speed this wagon has."

The speedometer crept up to seventy. With a feeling of relief the brothers watched their pursuer slowly drop behind.

"Hold on, fellas," yelled back the driver presently. "We're goin' to turn sharp in a minute."

The boys braced themselves. Then the cab rocked over on two wheels, careening around a bend into a dirt road leading from the highway. Trees swept past in a blur. Clouds of dust billowed up behind them.

"Whew, I didn't bargain for that one," said Frank.

"Well, it's a cinch we can't see Weeping Sam now even if he's there," Joe muttered dryly, as he looked back.

"And they can't see us, either," his brother added. "Where are we, Driver?"

The Deadly Switchboard 179

"Comin' to Jake Riley's Amusement Park. Be there in five minutes. You'll be able to get lost in there easy. Nobody would think of looking for you there.

Frank smiled at his brother. "That fellow has sense. Let's drop a line to the cab company and give him a boost."

"Good idea. He's certainly putting himself out for us," agreed Joe.

The taxi slithered to a stop at the gate of a large park.

"Here you are, boys. If you buy yourselves a ride on the roller coaster, your friend will never catch up with you," he laughed.

Frank handed the man double fare and the boys raced into the throngs surging about.

"Do you think Weeping Sam was following us, Frank?" Joe panted as the brothers finally came to a stop at the crowded merry-go-round arena.

"I couldn't tell for certain. Too much dust. What say we take a ride on this thing?" Frank proposed.

For the next hour they rode on everything in sight, enjoying themselves hugely despite the threat of Weeping Sam's possible appearance.

"We haven't seen him yet," Frank observed at length, as they got off the roller coaster for the fifth time.

"Guess we gave him the slip, all right Thanks to that cab driver of ours."



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Had the boys known the true facts, they would not have enjoyed themselves as much nor felt so confident. Weeping Sam, though outdistanced, had spied the taxi in which the Hardys had been riding, just as it returned to the main highway. He had ordered his own driver to proceed along the dirt road.

Coming to the amusement park, he had guessed where the boys were and had lain in wait for them. Time meant nothing to this man; he was trying to find Beeson. If these boys knew where the chief was, then he would wait indefinitely.

His patience was rewarded after a long time. He saw the Hardys come from the amusement park and look for a taxi. He ordered his driver to follow, keeping his headlights out.

"Maybe we'd better get back to Adar's," Frank was saying.

"Wherever that is from here," Joe laughed.

The boys, still on the alert for the gangster, jumped into the first cab in sight.

"Better tell the driver to take us to Erie first," suggested Joe. "We can find our way to Adar's better from there."

It was nearly an hour later when they reached the center of town. Total darkness had fallen now."

" Did you ever hear of a fellow named Adar I" Joe inquired of their driver.

The Deadly switchboard 181

The man scratched his head. "Yes, I have heard of 'im, all right. You're not goin' to Ms place, are you?"

Frank nodded.

"Well," the driver hesitated, "I'll drive you *near* it but no farther. No, sir, money couldn't get me to that place. It's haunted! Ghosts o' dead men 'round there, so people say."

After considerable coaxing the man agreed to drive them as far as the bend in the road several hundred yards from the house. Beaching the spot, they hopped out quietly.

"So long, and the best o' luck," called the driver, fearful to see these good-looking young men taking such chances.

As he turned and sped off, Frank spied a pinpoint light flashing in their direction through the trees. As the brothers cautiously watched, the light approached.

"Another one of Adar's ghosts?" Joe queried in a hoarse whisper.

"Maybe. Let's just stand here and-----"

"Frank! It's Dad! That's his secret signal!"

The shadow coming toward them assumed the unmistakable form of their father. In a moment the detective stood beside them.

"Everything go all right, boys?" he asked under his breath.

"Almost, but not quite. Weeping Sam ran

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into us at the airport." Hurriedly Frank recounted their experiences. "But we shook him off," he added confidently.

Mr. Hardy looked very serious. "We must work that much faster, boys. He may have picked up your trail. What's that you have, Frank? The book?"

The boy handed the volume to his father. In the rays of the flashlight, the detective carefully thumbed over the volume his sons had bought for Adar.

"Looks fine, boys. *I* think he 'll like it-if you can get close enough to give it to him," he added seriously.

"That's the question," Joe grunted. "But, Dad, you haven't told us what we're supposed to do if we get inside the house."

"Take these."

The detective pressed a pair of handcuffs into Frank's hand. For several moments he whispered earnestly to the boys the directions they were to follow.

"All right, Dad. We'll see you later," Joe breathed.

The brothers watched their father fade back into the thicket, then headed toward the house. Frank tapped on the massive door with the big knocker.

"Who's there?" wheezed a voice from an upstairs window several seconds later.

The Deadly Switchboard 183

"We-we have a present for you, Mr. Adar," the older Hardy lad called.

"A what? A present? For me?" The old man sounded incredulous. "Wait a minute."

In a few moments footsteps sounded behind the door. Bolts and chains rattled, then the huge portal swung open.

"Come right in, boys. What's this? For me? Goodness, nobody ever gave me a present before."

Tears trickled from his eyes as he took the volume from Frank. He opened it excitedly.

"This is going to tear my heart out," Joe whispered to his brother, nodding toward the latter's bulging pocket.

"Same here. But it has to be done."

"Why, this is a remarkable book, boys!" cackled Adar happily. "Thank you a thousand times! I-what are you doing? What-----?"

The old man's eyes popped in sudden alarm.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Adar," said Frank gently.

There was a loud *click* as he snapped the handcuffs on the inventor's unresisting arms.

"We're doing this to protect you, Mr. Adar," Joe remarked in a quavering voice. "You see, there are bandits loose somewhere in your house. We want you to be safe while we find them."

Frank nodded to his brother and together they picked up the bewildered scientist and

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placed him on a couch in the living room. Joe bound the man's legs securely with a strip of cloth he found hanging on a chair.

"No harm will come to you, Mr. Adar," Frank promised. "Just be calm until we return. Suppose you read the book."

The Hardys left him babbling senselessly to himself.

"Let's start here, Joe."

Frank twisted the doorknob of the bedroom. Nothing happened. Two other doors leading from the room likewise refused to budge despite all their efforts.

Trying those in the hall, they found one unlocked. It led into a narrow corridor at the end of which was situated a huge switchboard containing countless electric buttons.

"Must be the master control board, Frank," Joe whispered.

"Question is, what do you press first?" speculated the older lad.

"Listen! Somebody's coming."

Stealthy footsteps approached. A flashlight beam suddenly cut the gloom.

"Wait a moment, boys," sounded a loud whisper, as Fenton Hardy stepped beside his sons.

"None of the doors would open, Dad," Frank explained. "But this looks like the master switchboard."

The Deadly Switchboard 185

The detective played his light over the huge panel and scrutinized the maze of gadgets in front of him.

"This big one here looks like the master control of all of them," he whispered at length, pointing. "Look, here's some writing under it, 'Central Control Doors,' it says."

His sons peered at a tiny label.

"Better stand back, boys," said their father grimly.

He put on a pair of insulated gloves and stretched his hand toward the knob. At the instant his fingers closed over the object there was a brilliant flash and a loud *crackle*.

The detective crumpled.

"The gloves didn't work," groaned Joe, pending over his father.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A GHOST WALKS

Frank suppressed a cry. Dropping to his knees he felt his father's pulse.

"It's still beating, Joe."

"We'd better get some help quick!" advised his brother.

"No chance of finding any here. I know! Go get one of the men Dad has on guard outside!" Frank said hurriedly.

Joe dashed through the corridor into the lighted room where the old man lay bound to the couch. One look at the scowling face told the lad that no assistance could be expected from their prisoner even if they should turn him loose.

"I'll have to go outside," the boy told himself.

In three seconds he had reached the fringe of trees outside the house. Where were the guards ?

"Hey, there!" challenged a gruff voice as a huge figure blocked his path. The beam of a

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flashlight fell across the lad's face. "Oh, it's you, Joe Hardy."

"Quick, Mr. Easton, Dad's just had an electric shock," Joe panted, recognizing one of his father's associate detectives. "'We need help. Water--- --"

The man turned toward some bushes. " Henry! Come here!"

Another large figure stepped out.

"Mr. Hardy just got a shock. Maybe we'd better carry him outside. There's a brook over yonder," he added, pointing.

Joe hurried into the house with the two men at his heels. Frank met them.

"Dad's still unconscious. Can you carry him outdoors?"

"We'll lay him down by the brook," said the guard addressed as Henry. "Grab hold, Pete."

The boys accompanied the men to a small stream not far from the house, although they were urged to go on with their work.

"Your father will come around all right," Henry drawled, pressing a wet handkerchief against the detective's head. "You boys better get back inside and check up on things."

"Let the old scientist loose," added the second guard. "You'll never get anywhere without him."

Satisfying themselves that their father al-Ceady showed signs of regaining consciousness

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the brothers hurried into the house. Adar was writhing and straining against his bonds.

"Just a minute, Mr. Adar. "We're going to let you go," Frank told him.

In a jiffy he untied the strips of cloth around the old man's legs while Joe unlocked the handcuffs. The scientist leaped to his feet with a curse.

"You'll pay for this!" he screamed. "Tie up a defenseless old man, will you? You'll be sorry, you-you-----!"

Suddenly the room was plunged into total darkness. The boys could hear a faint shuffling sound, then silence.

"Has he left?" Joe whispered. "Mr. Adar, are you there?"

No answer.

"Jumping crickets, it's blacker than the inside of a barrel," Frank shuddered.

"We can find the hall door."

"And maybe it won't open."

This proved to be true.

"Let's go into the bedroom," suggested Joe.

He felt around until he located the door. The two boys passed through. The place was in total darkness and the Hardys had no idea how to turn on a light.

"Say, what's happening?" cried Frank.

"Feels as if we are moving!" said Joe excitedly.

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"We couldn't be. Maybe we're getting dizzy."

"No, I think we're moving. Frank, we're going *up*, sure as shooting."

"Feels that way, but how could we be?"

"Don't ask me, but we are."

Outside in the thicket near the brook voices were murmuring.

"I'm all right now, men." Fenton Hardy dried his face and pulled himself to his feet. "Go back to your posts while I have another look inside that crazy house."

The detective made his way toward the darkened structure and shoved the front door, which opened. After playing his flashlight over the interior of the hall he tried several doors, but found them locked. Finally, after turning two corners, he chanced upon one unlocked. It led into a den.

"No one here," he muttered to himself. "Wonder what's beyond."

He crossed the room, opened another door and uttered an ejaculation. Between two rows of long tables laden with laboratory apparatus lay four ice-covered figures in a huddle on the floor.

"What a sight!" he muttered in astonishment.

Hurrying over, the detective stopped beside them.

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"Ha-ha-ha!" cackled a voice suddenly.

Fenton Hardy jumped to his feet just as Adar, wild-looking and disheveled, shambled in.

"So, you are admiring my frozen ghosts! How do you like them?"

"Listen here, Adar, do you know who these men are?" demanded Mr. Hardy.

"Ha-ha! Do I know who they are? Why, they're ghosts. Frozen ghosts!"

Once more the man burst into a fiendish round of maniacal laughter.

"Listen to me, Adar! Listen!"

The laughter echoed with an eerie, hollow sound, issuing from the laboratory walls.

"Listen *to me!*" croaked Adar. "You listen to *me*, Mister Man, whoever you be. These are my frozen ghosts here, and pretty soon there will be another. Ha, there will be another any minute!" he Chortled.

The detective gasped as he felt a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. "Was he to be a victim?"

"Look at your hands," wheezed Adar. "Already they're frosted!"

Fenton Hardy suddenly noticed that he stood directly before a huge machine whose almost in-risible spotlight was focused directly on him.

"Be calm, my man," Adar was chuckling. "You can't move, so don't bother trying. You'll be well iced in about thirty seconds."

Helplessly the detective watched the frost

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line extend over his limbs and trunk. His knees wobbled. His head felt light.

"Ha! I see more ghosts!" Adar said suddenly, peering through a strange-looking telescope which he pointed outside the window. "Dozens of them, in fact. Surrounding my house! Well, isn't this wonderful!"

He quivered excitedly. Putting down the telescope, he dug one hand into a baggy pocket and withdrew an instrument resembling a small flashlight. This he focused toward the woods near the house. In a moment there was a sudden chorus of wild shrieks outside.

"Ha! My reception committee is functioning nicely!"

A weird, phosphorescent blotch had appeared and now was gliding to and fro among the trees in rhythm with the motions of the old man's tiny light.

"Look at them run!" yapped the eccentric wizard, slapping his thighs in glee as a dozen shadowy figures scattered wildly in all directions. "Guard my house, will they? I'll teach them a lesson they won't forget!"

He cupped one hand to his ear. "And listen to them scream and shout in terror! Hah, hah, hah!"

In the midst of the commotion in the thicket there was one figure that had not moved. Its thin lips were curled in a fiendish grin.

"Thinks he can scare me with his crazy in-

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ventions, does he? Huh! Weepin' Sam ain't scared as easy as Fenton Hardy's men. Look at 'em run away like frightened rabbits!"

The ruffian who had trailed the boys successfully, now lay half buried in the undergrowth, watching the strange globule of light swaying to and fro a hundred yards away. Suddenly the electric ghost headed directly toward him.

"Come on, you-I ain't afraid o' you," he snorted.

The glow began to assume the form of a human being. Inch by inch it crept on. Weeping Sam gulped.

"Hey, I didn't-I didn't know you was really a ghost. Honest I didn't!"

His voice rose to a quaver as the unearthly *Thing* advanced relentlessly.

"Please d-d-don't c-come no f-f-further!"

The scoundrel's face went white with terror. He tried to leap to his feet.

"I-I c-c-can't move! Please-d-don't kill me! I ain't done nothing! I ain't----  
-"

The ghostly glow suddenly vanished. There was an interval of silence, then the ruffian, resuming his bravado, gave a hoarse laugh.

"You'd better stay away from me, you half-baked ghost. You ain't even a ghost, I bet. Anyway you didn't dare to do nothing to Weeping Sam!" The man pulled himself to his feet bravely. "Now for the real business of the evening," he said, shaking his shoulders.

### A Ghost Walks 193

Step by step, with eyes and ears alert, he advanced toward the house. A few moments later he hesitated and gazed upward.

"Ha! A tree-just in the right place."

There was a slight rustling sound, then an interval of quiet.

"'Bout four more good hauls an' I'll be at the top." At last there was a sigh of satisfaction.

"Must be fifty feet high by now. Let's see, wasn 't there an attic window some place ? Yeah -there it is-right at the end of that branch over there."

The dark figure snaked out along a heavy limb whose tip just touched the side of the old house.

"Hope the blamed thing opens." The figure hesitated. "Did I hear a cracklin'? If this branch busts I'm done for."

There was a loud squeak.

"Why don't they make windows that open without so much racket!"

Another squeak, then a rattling sound followed by a soft thud, as the figure detached itself from the tree and melted inside the gloomy house.

"Ha! The old man may be smart, but he ain't smart enough to lock up his attic windows! Now for a look downstairs. Wonder where the steps are. Maybe-----"

Suddenly the room was flooded with light.

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With a gasp the intruder found himself face to face with Eben Adar.

"Who might *you* be?" demanded the old man.

The ruffian's fist swung out and the scientist crumpled.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE DISAPPEARING FLOOR

" there ! That '11 fix you for good I" Weeping Sam snarled, then smiled in satisfaction at his quickness.

He watched the motionless figure of the aged inventor for a moment.

"Only trouble is, you forgot to turn off the light, you old fool. S'pose somebody sees us!"

Chuckling to himself, the bank robber walked to a switch beside the door and gave it a flip. The room darkened.

"That's great. Everything's goin' fine. Now for a nice little trip downstairs." \*\*\*\*\*

"And then if we can find Duke Beeson, everything will be all right," Frank was saying in the blackness of their prison room.

" Yes. // we can find Beeson," Joe muttered. "It begins to look as if we aren't going to find even ourselves. I 'd like to know how that door got locked so quickly."

"I'm glad the moving stopped, anyhow. Do you suppose we really were moving, Joe?"

"That's about the fiftieth time you've asked

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that, Frank. All I can say is that it felt just like an elevator going up."

"I'm getting a little tired of sitting around here. Even if this switch won't work, let's keep banging at one of these doors till it smashes," said his brother.

"Frank! Somebody's talking!"

From somewhere just outside their room a muffled cry was heard.

"It's Weeping Sam, Frank. I couldn't forget that voice in a million years!"

The sounds came closer. "Duke Beeson! Where are you? Beeson!"

Joe nudged his brother. "I've an idea. I'll change the tone of my voice," he whispered.

Directly outside the door of their room which should lead to the living room they could hear footsteps shuffle to a halt.

"Beeson! You in there?"

"Hullo, Weeping Sam. Yes, we're here. Can't you get us out?"

Joe held his breath until the man outside should answer.

"Sure, Boss, I'll get you out. Soon's I find the right gadgets to open the doors."

The boys almost fell over each other in delight at the success of Joe's imitation of the voice of the gangster.

"What about Adar?" the younger Hardy lad went on. "He's around somewhere. Better watch out."

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There was a snort on the other side of the door.

"Around? Adar? He ain't around nowhere. I jest fixed the old loon up in the attic," the fellow bragged.

The boys gasped in horror.

"I'll be seein' you, Boss. Got to find the switches."

The footsteps moved off. The Hardys looked at each other, fear in their eyes.

"Jumping blazes," said Joe, "do you think he really did something awful to Mr. Adar?"

Frank's voice sounded hollow with despair. "I wouldn't doubt it. Golly, it makes me sick to think of such a possibility."

Joe leaped to his feet in a burst of anger, and started walking around impatiently.

"You better be quiet," Frank advised him, "or we'll get caught."

"Why doesn't somebody *do* something!" asked Joe. "Confound it, what's happened to all those men Dad had outside guarding the place? What good are they anyhow?"

At the instant when the youth was complaining, a group of figures sat in a huddle in the thicket beyond the house.

"They've been gone more than two hours, Conlon," one was saying. "Maybe we 'd better hike over and see what's wrong."

"Mr. Hardy said for us to stay out here and watch, Henry," returned another.

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;' Still, it looks as if something has gone haywire. Wait here, men. I'll have a look myself," said Conlon.

"If you aren't back in fifteen minutes, we're coming after you," broke in a third guard. "I think we're wasting time."

A hasty, whispered conference took place. A moment later a giant shadow detached itself from the group and swung into a large tree beside the house.

Inside the scientist's queer home a ruffian was fumbling at a panel on the wall. He seemed to be perplexed.

"Guess the switches must be back upstairs somewheres," Weeping Sam was muttering to himself. "Better have a look. If *I* can't find 'em, nobody can!" he boasted.

The wolfish-looking man scurried up the winding staircase to the third floor.

"Dark as a patch o' tar 'round this crazy house," he murmured. "Jest as well, I guess. Ha, there's a room-all lit up in the moonlight. Maybe some switches in-----"

There was a sudden *snap* followed by a series of thuds on the floor. A powerful beam in the hands of Detective Conlon showed up the twisted, unconscious figure of Weeping Sam whom he had just knocked out. A second later he flashed off the light and crept stealthily down the stairs. He could hear the voices of the

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Hardy boys, who had grown impatient and had started to speak above whispers.

"That you, boys?" the man called a moment later outside the same door where Weeping Sam had been.

The brothers stood in alert silence.

"Who's that, Frank?" Joe whispered an instant later.

"Hello, in there! Frank Hardy? Joe?"

"It's Conlon, Joe! Dad's chief assistant!" the older lad burst out.

"It's Conlon, all right," came the welcome voice again. There was a bump against the door, then a curse. "Don't this thing work?"

"The electrical controls to these doors seem to be locked," said Frank. "You'll probably have to find the master switchboard, Conlon. And do be careful. You may get a shock like Dad did."

"I'll find it. Got any light in there? Want some matches?" the man called.

There was a scraping sound under the door. Joe picked up a dozen matches.

"Thanks, Mr. Conlon. Say, Weeping Sam's out there somewhere. Better watch for him," the boy advised.

"Don't worry, fellows," came the hearty bass voice of their father's assistant. "He got in the moonlight just when I happened along. He won't bother us. See you later."

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Eagerly the Hardys divided the precious matches between them.



"Look, Joe, here's a switch I never noticed before."

In the fitful glare of matchlight Frank pointed at a tiny button. Joe pushed it.

"Frank! We're-----"

"We're moving! We're going down! The whole room, Joe!"

The boys uttered whoops of excitement.

" I get the idea now!" Joe exclaimed. " Adar has his rooms fixed like elevators! Why didn't I think of it before?"

"By jove, you're right! No wonder they seemed to change around. Jumping blazes, can you imagine such a thing?"

There was a sudden soft jolt and the moving room came to a stop. Joe looked at his brother in wonder.

"Now what?"

"Hey! That you boys again?" came a voice from outside the door.

"Mr. Conlon!" the brothers cried out together in astonishment.

"It's me, all right. Don't know how you got in *that* room. Five minutes ago I was talking to you upstairs!"

Excitedly the boys called out their discovery. The detective grunted.

"Well, that's mighty interesting, but still

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it don't get you out. I found the big switchboard you told me about, but it won't open this door. There's something here though that

might. I'll see if lean-----"

There was a sudden groan, then silence.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**fibe!**

"Ms. conlon! Mr. Conlon! What happened?" Joe shouted.

There was no answer. The groaning had ceased. There was utter silence in the house.

"He's been shocked, that's what happened," Frank declared. "Joe, we *must* get out of here and get out fast!"

The doors were sealed as tightly as ever. The secret panel would not open, either. Frantically the boys scrutinized walls and floor for possible signs of another release switch.

"Gee, we are in a tight spot," murmured Frank.

"Three more matches," Joe said bitterly. "Why didn't we bring some of our own!"

Frank seized a chair.

"Look out!" he cried.

He whirled the piece of furniture over his head and slammed it hard against the wall. There was a splintering crash. Then the boy uttered a whoop of triumph.

"There, Joe, look!"

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"It's a secret cabinet-inside the wall! Great Scott, Frank, you're a wonder."

"Don't ask me how I knew it was there. Just a hunch. It sounded hollow so I took the chance," his brother said gleefully.

Joe already was striking a match. As the light flared out a maze of wires could be seen inside the jagged aperture.

"Look, Frank. Here's the switch!"

"Wait a minute," advised the older boy. " Don't touch the thing."

He advanced with a rung of the smashed chair. Cautiously he extended the wooden rod and flipped the switch. There was a loud buzz, then silence.

"Try the door, Joe."

With his heart pounding, the younger lad twisted the handle of the one into the living room. He uttered a cry of delight as it opened Frank sprang to his brother's side.

"Where's Mr. Conlon?"

They peered through the darkness but could distinguish nothing. Finally Joe lit a match.

"There he is, Frank!"

A foot projected from behind a table. The boys hurried over.

"He's in bad shape, Joe. We'd better lay him on a bed."

"Not in that crazy room," replied his brother with a shake of his head.

"Wait a minute. I'll look around."

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Taking the detective's flashlight Joe disappeared. A moment later he was back.

"There's a room down the end of this hall, Frank. Looks like a den. It has a comfortable couch in it."

Together the boys picked up the stricken guard and deposited him on the large sofa in the room Joe had discovered. To their joy Conlon's eyelids began to flutter.

"He's coming around already," said Frank.

Briskly the boys rubbed the man's limbs.

"We'll certainly have to find that master switch," Joe commented. "Sooner or later somebody's going to get a shock he won't wake up from."

His brother nodded in agreement.

"Don't I know it. You can't tell what to touch and what not to around here," he said. "Spookiest and most dangerous place we have seen in a while."

Conlon's eyes flicked open. He shook his head groggily.

"Humph. Must've been hit by a steam roller," he said at length.

Frank grinned. "I'll bet it feels like that. You'd better stay quiet for a while, Mr. Conlon. You got a bad shock."

Almost before he had spoken the man had fallen into a sound sleep.

"Frank, there's a desk over in that corner. I hadn't noticed it before," said Joe. "Might be something interesting in it."

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"Let's have a look, anyway," suggested his brother. "Maybe we'll find a clue to all these crazy switches and wires and everything."

"Maybe, but I doubt it. Adar is pretty cagey," Joe admitted.

To their surprise the drawers were unlocked.

"Just like a crazy genius, Joe. Locks everything but those that are most important. Look at the wad of letters and papers in this place."

"Here are some notebooks. They're full of drawings signed by *Mm*. They're all his inventions, Frank! What a find!"

Excited, the younger boy flipped the pages while his brother peered over his shoulder.

"Wait, Joe, turn back to that page in the middle. Thought I saw something."

"Where do you mean? Back here? Say, there's a drawing of a house."

"Just as I thought. It's *this* house, Joe. And that's what we're looking for!"

"Hurrah!"

Eagerly Joe scanned a folded paper which had been pasted next to the drawing of the house. The sheet was covered with tiny lettering.

"Yes, everything's here, Frank. And the real master control switch is up in the attic, it says. It isn't where we thought it was, after all," cried the boy excitedly.

Already Frank was halfway to the door.

"Come on, Joe!"

The boys raced to the front stairs and

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bounded up the steps two at a time. Panting, they reached the attic. Frank swung Conlon's flashlight around the tiny hallway adjacent to the landing.

"Three rooms, Joe. Well, let's start with the first," he suggested.

Cautiously they pushed open the door. Both boys gasped as the light fell upon a figure huddled in the corner.

"It's Mr. Adar!" said Joe, rushing over. "He's bleeding. He's been attacked!"

Frank knelt and felt the old man's wrist.

"He's alive. Thank goodness! Quick, let's take him downstairs."

Their task was difficult, but at length the boys managed to reach the room where they had left Conlon. To their surprise they found the guard pacing up and down the floor.

"I'm feeling fine, boys," he said.

When he saw the man in their arms he gazed in awe. Quickly the situation was explained to him.

"You leave Adar here and I'll fix him up," the man said. "Go back and find the switch you're looking for," the guard insisted.

The Hardys hurried back to the attic room. Joe pulled from his pocket the paper he had torn from Adar's notebook.

"Should be in a closet on the north side of the room, Frank."

His brother pointed his flashlight. "There's

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the closet." He opened the door. "And there's the switch. Huh! Doesn't look like much, does it?"

"We'll find out soon enough," said Joe, turning the small lever. "All right, that's done. Now let's go through the whole house from top to bottom."

Frank shook his head. "Let's start with the laboratory, if we can find it. If Beeson is anywhere he's probably there."

"Right. Question is, where's the laboratory? Down in the basement?"

"It was once," Frank grinned.

The brothers raced down the stairs in the rays of the powerful flashlight, rushed through the first floor hallways until they came to the entrance to the basement, then descended. As they neared the bottom landing Frank caught his brother's arm.

"We'd better take it easy, Joe," he whispered. "Those bank robbers fooled us once."

On tiptoe they approached. Frank twisted the handle and the door swung open easily.

"There they are, Frank! Dad! Jumping crickets, Dad's frozen too!"

Shuddering, the Hardy boys gazed at the motionless, frost-covered figure of their father. Near by lay four other still forms. ,

"They'll be coming to any time, now that we've shut off the power," said Joe. "We'd, better go outside and get Dad's guards."

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"You're right," agreed Frank. "Look, there's that ice machine-pointing right at Dad. But it's turned off, all right."

"Stay here a minute," said Joe. "I'll get the men before Beeson wakes up. See if you can revive Dad in the meantime," he called over his shoulder.

Joe dashed to the front door and blew three blasts on a police whistle. A rush of feet answered his call.

"Hello! What's up?" queried a gruff voice in the blackness, as a group of detectives ran toward the porch.

"Follow me," the boy ordered.

The men thundered after the lad and a moment later stood blinking at the strange spectacle in the laboratory. Never in their lives had they seen such an awesome sight. Fenton Hardy's eyes were wide open, though he had not moved yet.

"Feeling all right, Mr. Hardy!" queried one of the guards nervously.

"A little stiff, but otherwise great, Henry. I think it did me good."

There was a sudden rustle just beyond the rays of the flashlights. Frank pointed his beam into the adjacent shadows.

"Better get out your handcuffs, men. The bank robbers are waking up fast!" he said.

"Right," they replied in chorus.

The detectives focused lights in the direction

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Frank indicated. Their amazement was boundless.

"Beeson! And three of his gang!" exclaimed one of the men. "Here, Jake, hand me those wristlets o' yours. "We'll fix these babies before they can stir up any more trouble. Their days as robbers are over!"

The gangster named Bunt suddenly began to thrash about wildly. Instantly the guards pounced upon him and a terrific battle ensued as the powerful ruffian attempted to escape.

Frank nudged his brother. "Keep an eye on things. I'll slip upstairs and see how Conlon is getting along with Adar."

The giant guard greeted the boy in the study. "Our friend here is still a little weak but he'll come around," he said.

The figure on the couch snorted. "Weak, nothing! Don't you believe it, young man!" He smiled at Frank. "I never felt better in my life. Tell me, what's all the commotion I hear downstairs in my house?"

Frank's heart leaped as he realized that the old man seemed to be perfectly normal. Hurriedly he told Adar of the situation with which they were confronted.

"Good! I'm glad you've trapped the bandits, and I'll be more glad when you have them behind bars in some good jail," he chuckled. "You'd better get back and help your men, Frank." He smiled and waved a hand.

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Back in the laboratory the guards had just succeeded in subduing the pugnacious Eunt.

"Better snap the cuffs on Beeson next, Scotty," one of the men suggested.

"Shucks, he's not even thawed out yet. Look at him-hasn't budged. He'll wait."

Before any of them could make a move, Pudge suddenly leaped to his feet. Lashing out with his fist, he fought his way to the door with the guards clambering behind him.

No one paid any attention to the figure still lying down. A slight smile played over the heavy features of the man on the floor.

"They think I'm still frozen, eh?" said the lips soundlessly.

Silently he removed a large hand from one pocket. The glittering eyes, peering from lids narrowed to mere slits, turned toward a large drape hanging from a window a few inches away from his side.

A match head projected from the fingers. Slowly the hand moved over the stone floor. There was a slight scratching sound which was drowned out



by the commotion in the doorway.

Suddenly a burst of flame leaped out into the crowded room.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A SEARCH REWARDED

the cries of anger as the ruffian Pudge at. tempted to beat his way to freedom turned t& screams of alarm. Solid sheets of flame soon were sweeping the window drapes. Any moment now they might jump to the highly inflammable chemicals on Adar's worktables!

Frank dived toward his father. In doing so he collided with one of the guards.

"I'll get your Dad out!" the man gasped. "Go warn the others! You know this house better than I do."

Frantically the boys dashed up the stairs. On the first floor landing Frank stopped and pointed. Far ahead of them a figure was disappearing.

" There goes Beeson!"

"Fire or no fire, we mustn't let him escape," gasped Joe. " What '11 we do  
1"

"The master switch!" cried Frank. "Turn it on and we'll find out how to keep that robber on the grounds by using one of Adar's gadgets."

Up to the attic raced Joe. He quickly pulled 211

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the lever to the main control. Meanwhile his brother ran to the study to consult Adar.

"W-what's going on downstairs?" Conlon exclaimed. "Here I am playing nursemaid when I ought to be catching criminals."

"Mr. Adar!" Frank fairly shouted. "The basement's on fire. The whole place will blow up any minute! We must get right out of the house."

The scientist sat up calmly. "Now, now, young man, just compose yourself." He winked an eye. "I wouldn't be much of an inventor, would I, if

I weren 't prepared for all emergencies ? Watch! Watch very carefully!"

He shambled across to his desk and fumbled beneath some papers.

"Where is that confounded switch-oh, here it is."

Already smoke was creeping into the room. Frank coughed. Conlon coughed.

"I press this switch, and in three seconds the fire will be out," said the scientist.

There was a loud rumbling sound beneath the floor. Frank listened incredulously. This man was the strangest kind of a wizard.

"What does that do, Mr. Adar?" the boy asked.

"Ha, you have never seen fire put out by electricity, have you? Certainly you haven't, for nobody else can do it. But I have developed

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a method of neutralizing fire with electrical vibrations."

"Is-is the fire out now, Mr. Adar?" Frank asked.

"Go and see for yourself, my boy."

"Another thing," cried Frank, as soon as this worry was over. " We thought we 'd caught the big criminal Duke Beeson but he's getting away. He's still on the grounds. Isn't there some way of stopping him before he reaches the main road?"

Adar smiled. " Yes," he replied," there is."

From his pocket he took a tiny flashlight and played it on one corner of the room where a metal disc was sunk in the floor.

"As I concentrate this beam here," he said, "each sensitized point outside becomes a- But you wouldn't understand. Just go outdoors and hunt around until you find your man. *Don't touch anything!* When you see him, whistle, and I'll retract the magnetized points. When he falls, grab him."

Bushing from the house, the boys played their light around, careful not to touch trees, bushes, or other objects. In a few moments they saw Beeson, his back against a post. He was unable to move or to speak.

Frank whistled shrilly. Almost at once the figure of the bank robber fell face downward. Joe slipped handcuffs on him.

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"I'll get you for this," the man hissed, as soon as he could speak.

The Hardys, paying no attention to him, led the bandit to the house. Heavy footsteps sounded around a bend. In a moment a group of guards came toward them. In their midst walked Pudge, Eunt and Spike, all handcuffed and scowling blackly.

"Hello! Look what we found!" broke in another voice.

Two detectives were supporting Weeping Sam between them. The roughneck had a large, swollen black eye, and looked badly shaken.

"Found him upstairs in one of the rooms," said one of his captors. "Conlon, you must have socked him. Nobody but you can muss up an eye that nice."

The big guard laughed and was acclaimed by everyone present.

"All right, men," said Fenton Hardy at length. "Watch these fellows. The police from town are on their way. I phoned them and they started at once."

The wail of sirens sounded a little while later. Shortly afterward Beeson and his henchmen were locked inside the patrol wagon and driven off. Mr. Hardy's guards followed behind, the procession moving off swiftly. Justice had conquered at last!

"That's fine! That's great!" smiled Adar

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from the front porch. "Should have been done long ago. I'm afraid I was partly responsible for obstructing justice, but-----"

He grinned and felt of his bandaged head.

"How does it feel, Mr. Adar?" Frank asked solicitously.

"I was just going to say I think that blow Weeping Sam gave me made a better man of me. I can think more clearly than I've been doing for years! It's wonderful!"

A few moments later, at Adar's invitation, they sat around a large table and partook of a bountiful meal.

"Our work isn't over yet, boys," Fenton Hardy said at length. "We still haven't found the loot we started out to locate. It must be hidden in the cave. I'm positive it's there."

"Maybe they have elevated floors like Mr. Adar's in their cave," Frank suggested. "Sometimes the most far-fetched idea is the truth."

Joe laid down his fork with a bang. "By Jove, I '11 bet my brother has hit the nail on the head," he said in admiration.

"Dad, let's go back there, pronto," added Frank. "Maybe Mr. Adar will come with us."

"Oh, no, no," the scientist said quickly.

Although the old man protested, the boys finally persuaded him to take part in their final adventure. Next day found him and the Hardy\*

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holding a conference at the mouth of the cave.

"Certain engineering principles must be applied if the elevated floor idea is to work satisfactorily, " Adar was saying. " One look at the arrangement inside will tell me what I want to know," he added excitedly.

By the aid of flashlights the group peered around inside. While Adar was studying the cavern, Frank walked over to one wall and pulled out a loose stone.

"Here's a switch," he announced excitedly.

With exclamations of astonishment the others watched him turn a small knob hidden in a crevice. The entire floor of the cave began to descend.

"Unless I am very much mistaken we soon shall encounter more rooms," said Mr. Hardy.

Joe suddenly whooped. "You're right, Dad. Look!"

As they slowly descended, the solid walls began to show large crevices. Inside each one the boys' lights revealed countless huge sacks bulging with coin and jewels. The brothers were almost beside themselves with excitement, and their father made no attempt to hide his surprise and delight.

"This is a great find," he said over and over.

Enlisting the aid of government officials the Hardys spent the next three days removing the vast amount of loot which had been stolen from banks all over the country.

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As the task neared completion, Frank took his father aside and held a long whispered conference. At length they summoned Mr. Adar.

"Why, I-I should be delighted to visit you," the scientist exclaimed. "And you say you will find a secretary for me to help me write my book ? I shall be very grateful!"

Their hearts almost bursting with joy, the boys returned home with their genial guest and prepared to offer every assistance in helping the old man turn his discoveries over to the scientific world. He now appeared to be most eager to do this.

One evening as the Hardy family and Adar sat around the Hardy living room, Chet came in. He listened attentively to several strange stories the wizard was telling, then said:

"I'd like to get hold of some of those double-laying electric chickens, fellows! Gee, you could have a couple of eggs any time you might want 'em."

"Sure, and a couple of ghosts to help you eat them, Chet," Joe laughed.

Their stout chum reddened.

"Joe Hardy, don't you say another word about ghosts," Aunt Gertrude burst out. "I hope you boys are planning to stay home and live quietly for a change!"

Frank gazed at his brother. "There's one thing we haven't figured out yet. You know we haven't located the man who owns the hundred-dollar bill we found when we were camping. Who is Harry Tanwick?"

"I don't know," said Joe, "but I won't be satisfied until we find out."

"Yes," put in Chet, "and you'll invite me again for a train ride to something simple like a picnic. Then you'll take me to an unearthly place, starve me, and scare me half to death. Finally," he grumbled, "you'll laugh and tell me the MYSTERY OF THE FLYING EXPRESS is the most exciting thing you've worked on yet!"

Little did the fat lad realize he had named the next case in which the Hardy boys would become involved.

"Now, Chet," teased Joe, "you certainly wouldn't want to be left out, would you?"

"You really don't look starved," added Frank, "and you're still alive-even though, as you admit, you're only half alive!"

Aunt Gertrude frowned, while her nephews smiled significantly at each other.

THE END

The Disappearing Floor

by Franklin W. Dixon

No. 19 in Hardy Boys series

This is the 1940 original text.

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